

A Familiar Frontier: The Kennedy Administration in the Congo

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ABSTRACT

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Previous historical scholarship has tended to support the idea that John F. Kennedy's inauguration began a period of increased U.S. involvement in and cooperation with Africa. However, U.S. treatment of the crisis in the Congo stayed remarkably the same from Eisenhower to Kennedy. In its treatment of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, its efforts to secure a new national leader, and its handling of the Belgian-backed, secessionist government in Katanga Province, the Kennedy Administration largely followed the lead of its immediate predecessor. This thesis uses government documents from the high levels of both Administrations to show that Kennedy's advisers reflected the same assumptions, often wrong ones, about U.S. interests in the Congo and the dangers of communist takeover. This thesis concludes that any desire for a changed Africa policy was not strong enough to lead the U.S. to compromise its perceived national interests in the Congo.

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Introduction

1960 was known as the Year of Africa, a label that only calls the mind to the many previous years that Africa had spent either neglected or dominated by the West. The year saw seventeen new nations spring up on the continent, freed from fading European empires whose earlier enthusiasm for overseas territory had dimmed as colonial administration became more difficult. The emergence of so many new states in so short a period dramatically reshaped the continent, not to mention the broader Third World, the United Nations and the Cold War. And no new state would attract more attention in the Year of Africa than the former Belgian colony of the Congo, which fell into violent conflict only days after it gained independence on June 30, 1960.

The history of the Congo has been a tumultuous one, at least since Leopold II, the King of the Belgians, emerged from the 1885 Berlin Conference with the Congo Free State acknowledged as a corporate state under his personal control. King Leopold used the locals to harvest valuable rubber to fill his own coffers, providing the clearest example of the cruel self-interest of colonialism. The best thing to be said about Leopold's reign is that inspired the bleak environment of Joseph Conrad's haunting novella *Heart of Darkness*, whose name alone evokes the despair of central Africa. The situation did not improve dramatically when the Congo became an official Belgian colony in 1908, with much of Leopold's administration staying on to run the territory.

Belgium's interest in the Congo was a primarily economic one, even in 1960; the foreboding jungles of central Africa certainly did a great deal to discourage any broader mission, including the development of local government or civil service.

There was a sizeable population of Europeans in the country up through and after the Congo gained independence. The European community was concentrated in the wealthiest province of Katanga, but their connection with the Congo was commercial rather than civic. The Belgians failed to provide even the basic infrastructure, like schools or hospitals, used to justify colonial endeavors elsewhere. There was a uniquely remote form of imperialism, with little active participation from the government in Brussels. Education and health care were administered by a variety of Christian missions without the aid of a centralized authority to standardize practices throughout the enormous colony. Accordingly, those institutions tended to perpetuate tribal and linguistic differences that would ultimately thwart the ability of the Congo to become a modern nation-state.¹

Despite, or perhaps because of, the backwardness of its colony, Belgium was willing to turn over control to the Congolese in 1960 with only a cursory introduction to self-government. Union Minière, the Belgian company that held much of the nation's substantial mineral wealth, intended to maintain a presence, especially in Katanga, but the Belgians were willing to rid themselves of their limited colonial obligations so long as business interests were not threatened. To this end, Belgium secured as president of the new nation the moderate and lethargic Joseph Kasavubu, who was intended to serve as a counterweight to the strong personality of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba was a controversial figure; the Belgians feared he would turn out to be a dangerous

¹ Report of Task Force on Africa, John F. Kennedy Library, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

radical and his party had won a plurality with only 25% of Parliamentary seats.

Belgium's distaste for Lumumba would only increase when he publicly embarrassed the Belgian King, Leopold's son Baudouin I, with a bluntly critical take on Belgian rule during the festivities to celebrate independence. This was just a preview of Lumumba's brief reign, wherein such maneuvers would be praised as frank and direct by his growing cult following while also making him so many enemies.

The Congo Crisis began only days after that memorable independence day speech in the new capital of Leopoldville. It would outlast the coming and going of a bevy of potential Congolese leaders, taking various shapes, as it began with a nationwide military mutiny and developed into a civil war between three rival governments. The original government in Leopoldville eventually spawned a leftist opposition government in Stanleyville, first organized behind the charismatic Lumumba, while the very existence of this alternative pushed the Leopoldville contingent toward a moderate, pro-Western approach. And just as soon as chaos broke out in July 1960, Katanga used its economic advantages to declare its independence, establishing a reactionary, Belgian-dominated state in Elisabethville. These three rival governments form the organizational backbone of this thesis, reflecting the shifts in focus of the United States and the United Nations among the various points of concern as the crisis developed.

The timing of the Congo Crisis meant that the response of the United States would be decided by multiple presidential administrations. When the Congo gained its independence in 1960, Dwight D. Eisenhower was in the last months of his presidency and John F. Kennedy was running a campaign to replace him. Yet the crisis that Kennedy inherited upon his inauguration in January 1961 was different in some key aspects than

the crisis that Eisenhower faced, even near the end of his term. This thesis will examine the events of 1960 and 1961, a period which includes events of enormous significance including the secession of Katanga, Lumumba's dismissal by President Kasavubu, the rise of the ambitious young Colonel Joseph Mobutu, Lumumba's kidnapping and secret assassination, the death of U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold and the U.N.'s armed intervention in Katanga.

This thesis could easily have extended through Mobutu's decisive coup d'état in 1965, and thus the Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, but events played out differently after 1961. It would be more difficult to establish a narrative of American involvement, because, in the minds of many in the West, the Congo Crisis was substantially resolved by the end of 1961. The U.S. and the U.N. were losing interest in the day-to-day events in the country, and would play only a sporadic role over the next few years. The death of Hammarskjold in September 1961 deprived the Congo of one of its main advocates on the international stage, and his successor U Thant never developed a comparable personal stake in the crisis. Yet the trend was already established by the end of 1961, and there were more than enough critical moments in the eighteen preceding months in which to find continuity. The task of this thesis is to show that such a trend existed in that period, drawing the policies of Eisenhower and Kennedy into a single, unified account, despite what the historical actors themselves have said.

John F. Kennedy came to office with the promise of a New Frontier for the United States, a far-reaching policy initiative that emerged out of Kennedy's speech at the Democratic National Convention in August 1960. Although the New Frontier is sometimes thought of as a set of domestic goals, its very name makes it clear that

Kennedy intended it to apply to foreign policy as well. One of the new frontiers to which Americans could look in 1960 was that of Africa, with its abundance of newly independent countries, and it was a frontier for which the new President was uniquely well-suited. As a Senator, Kennedy had made his name with an impassioned speech in 1957 in support of Algeria's attempt to gain independence from France. The speech was deeply unpopular with the French press as well as Americans of both parties, including President Eisenhower and Eisenhower's two-time Democratic opponent, Adlai Stevenson.² Yet it made a name for Kennedy in both domestic and international circles, and led him to be appointed Chairman of the brand new Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa in 1959. Kennedy's adviser Ted Sorensen wasted no time in looking for ways to "exploit" this position, hoping to establish Kennedy as a "concerned, farsighted, progressive American leader" as well as "the Senator who knows about Africa."³

Kennedy used his familiarity with Africa to great effect in attacking the Eisenhower Administration, particularly as his opponent in the 1960 presidential election was Vice-President Richard Nixon. In his speech on Algeria, Kennedy had described Eisenhower's policy on the Third World as "cautious neutrality on all the real issues, and a restatement of our obvious dependence upon our European friends...and our obvious desire not to become involved."⁴ After this scathing condemnation, Kennedy turned his status as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa into a series of thirteen speeches about the continent before a variety of interested bodies in 1959 and 1960. The speeches usually made the same general points, connecting Africa's independence movement to

² Richard D. Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 20

³ Memo from Sorensen to Kennedy, President's Office Files, Box 114, Folder 6

⁴ Qtd. in Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 20

the revolutionary history of the United States and establishing that America's proper role was to offer education, food and development capital for the new countries.

During the election, Kennedy tried to use Nixon's reputation as a Cold Warrior against him, turning the Vice-President's own words against him. "Our leaders may talk of 'winning the battle for men's minds,' which the Vice President stressed upon his return from that continent...but the people of Africa are more interested in development than they are in doctrine. They are more interested in achieving a decent standard of living than in following the standards of either East or West."⁵ Yet he was just as quick to condemn the Eisenhower Administration for losing Africa to communism; in one of his debates with Nixon, Kennedy said "I have seen us ignore Africa."⁶ His example was the radical regime in Guinea, which he used to bemoan the failure of the U.S. to reach out to Africa and secure the continent in the anti-communist camp. Another common criticism of Kennedy's was that Eisenhower tended to select political cronies as ambassadors to Third World countries, something he portrayed as an especially dangerous gamble given that such states were rarely considered safe from communist plots.

On one level, this strategy was designed to appeal to African-American voters who had noticed his poor record on civil rights while not alienating the white Southern wing of the Democratic Party. The fact that Kennedy could couch his agenda in anti-communist rhetoric made it practically beyond reproach. At the same time, it is clear from internal documents of the Kennedy Administration that the campaign's focus on Africa was not just a cynical political calculation. The Kennedy campaign's briefing paper on Africa declared that "American policy toward Africa has failed to either operate

⁵ Kennedy's Remarks to Conference of American Society on African Culture, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1030, Folder 23

⁶ Qtd. in Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 30

in terms of American interest or to take into consideration the major problems of Africans.”⁷

Kennedy’s conspicuous devotion to African affairs is also seen in his highly-publicized first Cabinet selection. Kennedy announced former Michigan Governor G. Mennen Williams as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs before filling more visible posts, noticeably leaving open the spot above Williams in the State Department. Williams recalled that when he took the position, “the directive was ‘to take the ceiling off your imaginations’ and to be uninhibited by past attitudes.”⁸ The transition period also saw Kennedy appoint a large group of mostly academics as his Task Force on Africa, charged with the delivery of a massive report on the continent by January 1, 1961. The Task Force echoed the others voices by advising that “our approach to Africa lacks a doctrine...the development of such a doctrine, and its appropriate exposition, both publicly and privately, deserve the highest priority.”⁹

African leaders were among those persuaded by Kennedy’s rhetoric. Guinean President Sékou Touré, whose rise to power Kennedy had used as an example of the failure of the Eisenhower Administration, had a highly publicized meeting with Kennedy during the campaign and expressed his appreciation for the Senator’s speech on Algeria.¹⁰ Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah sent a telegram to Kennedy shortly after his inauguration to offer his perspective on the Congo Crisis, but also to take note of the increased African focus of the President’s inner circle, a not particularly veiled criticism of the Eisenhower Administration. He explained that it gave him “great hope and

⁷ Briefing Paper for Kennedy, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 993A, Folder 24

⁸ Analytical Chronology, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis 3/9/61

⁹ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

¹⁰ Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 31

confidence” that the “Cabinet includes advisers who, I believe, understand the fundamental problems of our continent.”¹¹

The perspective that Kennedy’s Administration represented a repudiation of Eisenhower policies and a new dawn for U.S.-African relations is strongly reflected in the historical scholarship. Catherine Hoskyns writes that “by January 1961 the situation had changed...the new men whom Kennedy had appointed regarded the Eisenhower Congo policy as a failure and were advocating a change.”¹² Madeleine G. Kalb’s *The Congo Cables*, a work to which this thesis nonetheless owes a debt of gratitude, divides the Congo Crisis into two distinct sections: “The Eisenhower Policy” and “The Kennedy Policy,” with the last chapter of the book entitled “Kennedy: An Unexpected Success.” Even critical accounts of Kennedy’s Africa policy, which acknowledge that it did not come close to living up to the initial fervor of its beginnings, attribute the eventual return of American disinterest to other factors: a hostile congress, the continued presence of Europe-oriented officials in the State Department, or pressing Cold War commitments in other parts of the world.¹³

However, the conception of a dramatically different policy under Kennedy is unsupported by the events in the Congo in 1961. On virtually all major concerns, the United States adopted a substantially similar position under Kennedy in 1961 as it had under Eisenhower in 1960. Looking at the three sequential areas of American intervention, Stanleyville, Leopoldville and Elisabethville, a careful consideration of events and reactions in 1960 and 1961 will show that Kennedy’s actions almost always

¹¹ Telegram from Nkrumah to Kennedy, President’s Office Files, Box 114, Folder 11

¹² Catherine Hoskyns, *The Congo since Independence, January 1960-December 1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 313

¹³ Waldemar A. Nielsen, *The Great Powers and Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 291-293

found a precedent in the actions of Eisenhower. Accordingly, the thesis will necessarily move back and forth chronologically to illuminate patterns. Most strikingly, the Kennedy Administration, despite a different ideological approach to the Cold War than its predecessor, made almost exactly the same errors of judgment in assessing the threats posed by Lumumba and the Soviet Union as the Eisenhower Administration had. This is not to say that Kennedy and his advisers were ignorant nor that they were particularly deceitful or mean-spirited. Throughout the Congo Crisis, the United States acted to secure its own very limited interests in the new nation to the virtual exclusion of considerations about the Congolese people, either their welfare or their wishes.

Chapter One focuses on American concerns with the Lumumbist opposition government in Stanleyville and its connection with the Soviet Union. This chapter addresses the beginning of Kennedy's Presidency, when the situation in the Congo was still very unclear. Only days before Kennedy's inauguration on January 20, 1960, Patrice Lumumba had been kidnapped and surreptitiously killed. However, it would be almost a month before the Katangese government announced his death, creating a situation in which the United States still planned for the contingency that Lumumba might return to power. Fears of Lumumba's oratory gifts and a possible communist takeover of the Congo animated the decisions of this period just as they had when Eisenhower was in office, despite the fact that the danger posed by Lumumba and the U.S.S.R. was now greatly reduced. The chapter begins by providing the crucial historical context of the Kennedy Administration's outlook, detailing Lumumba's political background and the strong emotions he aroused in Eisenhower and his advisers.

Next, Chapter Two deals with the efforts to set up a legitimate government in Leopoldville that would be acceptable to the international community. It picks the story up with the news that Lumumba is dead, representing a major shift in the political dynamics of the Congo. The Kennedy Administration turned to the task of selecting a replacement for Lumumba, someone more likely to policies more in line with U.S. interests in the Congo. Various American officials considered a few options before settling on Cyrille Adoula and using superpower influence to push him into the Premiership. The diplomatic wrangling of this period, in which the U.S. and U.N. representatives in the Congo had to negotiate with envoys from each of the three governments, culminated with the successful conference in Lovanium that finally chose a new government. Again, Kennedy's moves mirror those of Eisenhower, who was among the multitudes dissatisfied with Lumumba and therefore started to look for possible replacements not long after the Prime Minister had taken office.

Finally, Chapter Three concludes the story with an exploration of the events in Elisabethville, a part of the equation that had been largely ignored for almost a year as succession battles raged in the rest of the country. During the final few months of 1961, Katanga saw substantive fighting between U.N. forces and a variety of local and European supporters of Moise Tshombe's secessionist regime. This period represented the most direct involvement by the U.S. and the U.N. in Congolese affairs, something that prompted both to work for a reduction of their role. Tshombe had been a secondary character for most of the events of 1960-61, playing his most significant parts at the beginning and end of this story. Despite the enormous changes in the nation over that time, Kennedy dealt with him much as Eisenhower had done, with both demonstrating a

willingness to tolerate him because of his repudiation of Communism. Thus, this chapter will include a substantial explanation of the historical context as well, this time the background of Katanga's secession in July 1960 and how that drew the U.S. into the Congo Crisis in the first place.

Taken together, the three chapters deal with the major policy initiatives of the U.S. during 1961: first, responding to Lumumba's kidnapping and death; second, organizing a Congolese government more sympathetic to American interests; and third, addressing the Katanga secession and the use of force by U.N. troops. It should be noted that this is a thesis about American actors, and not primarily about actors in the United Nations. Representatives of the U.N. show up frequently in these pages, but only when their presence changes the situation on the ground or sheds light on the motivations of the U.S. policy. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold is a frequent participant in the narrative, mostly because of his enthusiasm for African decolonization, a prospect which went so badly awry in the Congo, thanks in part to American actions.

Chapter One:

STANLEYVILLE

Senator John F. Kennedy, running for the chance to replace President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1960 election, took the unprecedented step of including Africa policy as a key element of his campaign strategy. Attempting to capitalize on the upcoming explosion of newly independent states in Africa, Kennedy delivered a speech before the African diplomatic corps in Washington on June 24. Like his previous speeches on Africa, Kennedy proposed U.S. aid in education, food and development capital as part of a program of increased cooperation with Africa. Kennedy was clear with his audience: “I stress the word ‘cooperate.’”¹ The statement was a repudiation of previous American policy toward Africa, and especially the lack of engagement from Eisenhower. It was an effective rhetorical device, but it did not serve as a prescription for a change in American foreign policy. Kennedy was much more engaged with African issues than Eisenhower ever was, but his Administration did not stress the word ‘cooperate’ in its response to the crisis that was about to break out in the Congo.

The reaction of President Eisenhower and his administration upon the outbreak of conflict in the Republic of the Congo demonstrates exactly the kind of mindset Kennedy was disparaging on the campaign trail. There is little evidence that Eisenhower or his

¹ Remarks of Kennedy to African Diplomatic Corps, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1030, Folder 1

advisers were paying much attention when the situation in the Congo started to smolder directly after the nation gained its independence on June 30, 1960. To the extent that officials at the high levels of U.S. government took notice of the developing crisis, it was to articulate disdain for Patrice Lumumba, the young, enigmatic Prime Minister of the new nation. Allen Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence, described Lumumba's brand-new government to the National Security Council as "weak" and characterized by "a leftist tinge."¹ Dulles would prove himself to be one of the most vocal critics of Lumumba, a position for which there was not a small amount of competition. His simplistic comments will show not only the blinding power of Cold War anti-Communism, but also his casual treatment of facts. Newly-appointed Ambassador Clare Timberlake was another who expressed concern that Lumumba was a wild card, and that the Congo was not yet ready to handle its own affairs as an independent nation. Yet there is little evidence that Eisenhower or his top aides were putting much effort into understanding the particularities of Lumumba or the Congo itself. The muted American reaction in the early days of the Congo crisis tends to validate Kennedy's criticisms.

Eisenhower's disengagement is particularly egregious because violence had broken out in an area of which the President, and the vast majority of international observers, had little prior knowledge. The Congo was not controlled by a major imperial power like France or Great Britain, nor had it been a likely candidate for independence. In the late 1950s, a wide variety of African colonies of European imperial powers began to agitate seriously for independence, the catalyst having come in 1957 when the British colony of the Gold Coast declared itself the independent nation of Ghana, yet there was not yet a noteworthy independence movement in the Congo. French President Charles de

¹ Editorial Note, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1958-1960, 14:280

Gaule responded to the broader zeitgeist by offering independence to French West and Equatorial Africa in a speech in Brazzaville in 1958. The speech, given just across the Congo River from Leopoldville, kick-started demands for the Congo's independence from Belgium, which had exploited the huge colony for its natural resources ever since King Leopold established a personal colony there in 1885 and named the capital for himself. Unlike the French or British, who had tended to look upon their colonies with at least a degree of responsibility, even if it was overshadowed by paternalism and economic exploitation, Belgium had never shown much civic interest in its only significant colony. The wave of decolonization did little to change the situation, as the Belgians did not make much effort to ready the Congo for self-rule, not even organizing locally-run municipal governments until 1957. As many sources have pointed out, there were only sixteen Congolese college graduates in 1960.²

It is understandable, then, that the Belgians were caught off-guard when Africa's drive for independence resonated so strongly in Leopoldville. After all, Congolese political parties had only been organized since the 1957 municipal elections, which were held in only three cities. As a means of comparison, the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), which would later be the party of Patrice Lumumba, had published a manifesto in 1956 demanding independence, but requiring only that it be granted within thirty years. This framework was borrowed from a Belgian academic, who had proposed a thirty-year plan in 1955, prompting negative reactions from both sides. Conservative Belgians opposed granting independence to the Congo even on the thirty-year plan, whereas rioters in the Congo were demanding immediate independence in January 1959.

² A Congo Chronology, National Security Files, Box 28, Folder: Congo General 12/20/61 "Congo Chronology"

A year later, responding to the pressures coming from France's massive decolonization of Africa in 1960, Belgium invited Congolese leaders to participate in a round-table conference in Belgium. The conference reflected the new, shorter timetable: independence was scheduled for June 30, with parliamentary elections to come even sooner.³

The need to build a national government under such time constraints was complicated by the tribal divisions within the diverse environments of the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa. British and French leaders had encouraged fledgling states to adopt one or two parties, but the history of Belgian neglect led to a multitude of small local parties, segregated by tribe and region. Lumumba, a figure already regarded with suspicion by many, including Eisenhower's team, had been the surprise winner of the parliamentary elections in May, with his MNC winning a small plurality in the politically divided legislature: 35 out of 137 seats.⁴ Joseph Kasavubu was chosen for the largely-ceremonial role of President at the suggestion of Brussels. The Belgians hoped that Kasavubu might restrain the fiery Prime Minister Lumumba, who had been in a Belgian jail until January 1960 for his role in the previous year's riots. Lumumba lived up to his reputation as a thorn in Belgium's side immediately, delivering an impassioned speech on independence day. He publicly embarrassed King Baudouin I when he declared that "our wounds are too fresh to forget."⁵ Only a week later, the Congo crisis began in earnest, as the Congolese soldiers in Thysville, dangerously close to the capital, mutinied against their officer corps, made up exclusively of white Belgians.

³ Madeleine G. Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa — From Eisenhower to Kennedy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1982), xxi

⁴ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, xxv

⁵ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 3

The rebellious soldiers demanded better pay and promotions, as well as the dismissal of General Emile Janssens, the leader of the Force Publique. Janssens had helped to precipitate the mutiny when he made the miscalculation of telling the Congolese enlisted men that nothing would be changing after independence, with a mind to shoring up their discipline. Within a few days, anarchy reigned in Leopoldville; the British and French Embassies evacuated nonessential personnel and the U.S. Embassy was encircled by mutinous soldiers, demonstrating their hostility to Western involvement in the country. In Leopoldville, there were rumors of random attacks on white people happening throughout the countryside.⁶ Lumumba, in his first test as Prime Minister, had quickly dispatched Janssens and promoted every single soldier by one rank, which eased tensions but was not enough to end the insubordination. On July 8, Lumumba realized he had little choice but to accede to demands by discharging all Belgian officers. He followed up that move by flying frantically back and forth across the country with Kasavubu, trying to prevail on troops to end their rebellion and return to their barracks. These efforts had only temporary success, and Belgium announced on July 9 that it would send twelve hundred soldiers to two bases that Belgium still held in the country, one in Kitona on the Atlantic coast and not far from Thysville and another in Katanga. The new arrivals would complement the twenty-five hundred Belgian troops still in the Congo. Brussels paid lip service to Congolese independence, explaining that its soldiers would only intervene to save lives (and probably only European ones at that), but they went on to act in at least twenty different places in the Congo over the next week.⁷

⁶ Analytical Chronology 1/25/61, President's Office Files, Box 114, Folder 14

⁷ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 6

On July 11, a few events dramatically changed the situation in the Congo, introducing new players onto the scene. Lumumba and Kasavubu arrived in Luluabourg, the capital of diamond-rich Kasai Province, and immediately recognized the danger of the situation there. Fearing for the safety of Europeans in Luluabourg, they authorized Belgian military intervention “provided their mission was restricted to the protection of persons and property,” marking the only time the Congolese would authorize Belgian action.⁸ Even more significantly, Katanga Province seceded from the Republic of the Congo on the same day. The country’s richest province, Katanga controlled most of the country’s significant mineral wealth, and its uncertain status had ramifications for the U.S. and its allies in Western Europe. The Katanga secession will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Three, but it represented a huge blow to Lumumba and Kasavubu, especially as they demonstrated that they could not end the mutiny of the Force Publique nor put a stop to continued Belgian interference. Those Belgians who were eager to maintain control of the resources of Katanga found a willing partner in Moise Tshombe, the President of independent Katanga, who relied on muscle from foreign mercenaries to secure his power. It was not clear that the government in Leopoldville would be able to sustain itself without the economic resources of the Katangese mines to which it had just lost access.

Clare Timberlake, the hardheaded U.S. Ambassador in Leopoldville, was left to respond to the crisis largely without instructions from Washington. He concluded rightly that the likeliest outcomes in the Congo, continued anarchy or obvious reliance on Belgium to quell the disorder, would both undermine the U.S. position there. Accordingly, he encouraged Lumumba to make a request for assistance to Dr. Ralph

⁸ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 6

Bunche, the U.N. Under Secretary for Special Political Affairs, who had been in Leopoldville for the independence celebration and remained there because of the fear of trouble. Bunche was a widely-respected diplomat and uniquely well-suited to the job; an African-American, he was a vocal supporter of the civil rights movement in the U.S. and had already won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work negotiating an armistice in Palestine.

Things moved slowly from that point, with the bureaucracy of a large international organization unable to match the lightning speed of developments on the ground in the Congo. U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold of Sweden, saw the Year of Africa as an exciting opportunity for the United Nations to play a larger role through economic and technical assistance to the newly-independent nations, and was disappointed by the outbreak of violence in the Congo. He hoped to handle the request for assistance informally without a prolonged standoff between East and West in the Security Council.⁹ However, the rapidly expanding violence in the Congo made it impractical, as it started to look like the U.N. was ignoring the growing crisis, and Hammarskjold began to fear that the U.S. or U.S.S.R. would intervene unilaterally. This anxiety seems misplaced given that neither Eisenhower nor Khrushchev demonstrated the slightest inclination toward sending in troops unilaterally, yet it was on Hammarskjold's mind in July 1960. Impatient with this approach, a number of high-level Congolese officials, led by Deputy Premier Antoine Gizenga and Foreign Minister Justin Bomboko, visited Timberlake on July 12 to request a contingent of 2,000 American soldiers.

Gizenga and Bomboko represented the extremes of opinion within the Congolese cabinet, and were perhaps chosen for the mission to the U.S. Ambassador accordingly.¹⁰

⁹ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 12

¹⁰ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 8

Gizenga was a committed Marxist, more solidly radical than Lumumba, while Bomboko was probably the most pro-Western figure in the government, and had made a name for himself a few days earlier, by putting himself in danger to rescue Belgian civilians from mutinous soldiers. Timberlake counseled patience, saying that the U.N. could not move much faster, while going on to state that he did not anticipate that the U.S. would be willing to send troops outside of the U.N. mandate as they were requesting.¹¹ He adopted a somewhat different position in his telephone call to the State Department, when he advised that two companies of U.S. Army infantry which had been put on stand-by status in Germany to evacuate refugees “should be flown down to Brazzaville,” across the river from Leopoldville. “Their presence there would have a very desirable effect.”¹²

In a private telephone call with Secretary of State Christian Herter, President Eisenhower echoed Timberlake’s position with the Cabinet ministers, repeating the same language throughout the conversation. Eisenhower explained that “we are always willing to do our duty through the UN but we are not going to unilaterally get into this...we would be completely in error to go in unilaterally.”¹³ Kennedy had well aware of this way of thinking in the Eisenhower Administration, remarking that when it came to the developing world, there was an “obvious desire not to become involved.”¹⁴ Indeed, Eisenhower’s discomfort was not limited to a unilateral American move: Herter said he was “very adverse to sending in our troops in these circumstances. The President said that was right; that he didn’t think any Western troops should go in.”¹⁵ In this situation, the President and the Secretary of State agreed that there was no benefit for America to get

¹¹ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 9

¹² Telegram from John S.D. Eisenhower to Andrew Goodpaster, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:294

¹³ Memo of Telephone Conversation between Eisenhower and Herter, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:296

¹⁴ Qtd. in Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 20

¹⁵ Memo of Telephone Conversation between Eisenhower and Herter, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:296

involved in central Africa, when the United Nations can do that job for them. In fact, when Herter mentioned that the country was experiencing a major food shortage, Eisenhower “commented maybe after this situation some of these people won’t want now to be independent.”¹⁶ Herter passed this decision on to Timberlake, explaining that the U.S. would not send in troops outside of the U.N. framework, and was hesitant to do so even within it.¹⁷

This would prove to be a moot point, as Lumumba was furious to find out that Gizenga and Bomboko had requested U.S. troops to intervene without his approval. He had been out of the capital, working with Kasavubu on a second request to the United Nations. This new version altered the terms of their original request so that the Congo now asked for “urgent dispatch” of U.N. soldiers to protect the country from the unauthorized Belgian troops, which represented an “act of aggression.”¹⁸ Belgian forces had acted on their own initiative to bombard the city of Matadi, in an effort to secure the nation’s chief port from mutinous Congolese soldiers. This attack was particularly distressing to Lumumba, both because of its proximity to Leopoldville and the high death tolls being reported, soon revealed to be hugely exaggerated. The attack on Matadi inspired Lumumba’s second dispatch to the U.N., which also attributed the Katangese secession to Belgian influence and promised to turn to the “Bandung Treaty Powers” if the U.N. did not act without delay.¹⁹ Lumumba refers here to the nascent non-aligned movement, a bloc of African and Asian states that had started to band together at 1955’s

¹⁶ Memo of Telephone Conversation between Eisenhower and Herter, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:296

¹⁷ Telegram from Herter to Timberlake, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:298

¹⁸ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 9-10

¹⁹ Memo of Telephone Conversation between Eisenhower and Herter, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:300, Note 2

Bandung Conference to offer a third path that did not require domination by either U.S. or U.S.S.R.

This was only the first of many times that Lumumba would threaten to switch allegiances in an effort to spur U.N. action, and it was as ineffective here as it usually was. Westerners feared Soviet moves to take advantage of the chaos in the Congo, and the Soviets were concerned that the Western powers would maintain their economic domination over the country, as they had in a number of their former colonies. However, both sides recognized that the ideal solution to protect their prestige in Africa was one in which African troops played the leading role. Hammarskjold reversed his previous reticence and called an urgent meeting of the Security Council on July 13. The Resolution eventually approved required Belgium to remove all troops from the Congo, and provided for U.N. military assistance until Congolese troops were able to maintain order independently. The resolution was somewhat more critical of Belgian actions than the West would have liked, but the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Henry Cabot Lodge, told Herter that “we really did much better than we had a right to expect.”²⁰

This feeling was short-lived, however, as events in the Congo played directly into Western fears. On July 14, the same day that the U.N. had authorized an operation in the Congo, Lumumba and Kasavubu sent a public cable to Nikita Khrushchev, Premier of the Soviet Union. The cable was another example of Lumumba’s signature tactic of requesting help from actors outside the U.N. It stated, “Given the threats to the neutrality of the Republic of the Congo from Belgium and various Western nations conspiring with her against our independence, we ask you to watch the Congo situation closely. We might be led to ask help from the Soviet Union if the Western camp does not stop its aggression

²⁰ Memo of Telephone Conversation between Herter and Lodge, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:307

against our sovereignty.”²¹ Almost simultaneously, the Republic of the Congo officially severed its diplomatic ties with Belgium. In a National Security Council meeting the next day, Allen Dulles expressed his concern, adding that “much... depended on the speed with which the UN presence could be established in the Congo.”²² On this count, Dulles did not have to worry; the first U.N. forces, from independent African states, reached the Congo on July 15, less than two days after the passage of the Security Council Resolution.

Hammarhjold provided for only smaller, ostensibly neutral countries to send troops: first, African states, followed by other nations not holding a permanent seat on the Security Council.²³ Nevertheless, the United States played a major role in the early days, providing ninety aircraft for transporting soldiers and food, handling communication between U.N. personnel and filling the most critical civilian jobs in the country.²⁴ The Soviet Union also involved itself in the effort, although its role was outside the framework of the U.N.’s operation. Without the transportation capabilities provided by the U.N. and the U.S., its contribution was limited to twenty-six airplanes and six helicopters, along with food and trucks.²⁵ This relatively small degree of involvement was enough to rile the West.

Lumumba’s appeal for Soviet aid was much more effective in convincing the West that he was aligned with Moscow than it was at securing any benefits for the Congo. Hammarhjold offered his analysis about the contrasting goals of the U.N. and

²¹ Qtd. in Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010), 95

²² Memo of National Security Council Meeting, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:310

²³ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 17

²⁴ Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 96

²⁵ Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 97-8

the U.S.S.R. in the Congo: “For the moment, our interests are nearly parallel, and the Russians will cooperate with us. But there is no doubt in my mind that we are on a collision course, and that eventually the two policy lines will clash.”²⁶ Meanwhile, leading figures in Belgium and the U.S. were increasingly convinced that Lumumba was acting with Soviet direction after the public appeal for Soviet assistance and the demand for a new U.N. resolution. He only increased that suspicion when he issued an ultimatum on July 17 demanding the removal of all Belgian troops within two days, an unrealistic deadline again backed by the threat of turning to the Soviets if the U.N. would not comply. The Congolese ultimatum succeeded in removing all Belgian troops from Leopoldville by July 23, although Belgium would maintain a strong presence in Katanga going forward.

On a strategic scale, however, the ultimatum was a horrible misstep, as the aggressiveness of Lumumba’s diplomacy had the effect of turning many in the U.N. against him. This was particularly true of Ralph Bunche, who felt that Lumumba had misrepresented his earlier statements to constitute a supposed promise that the Belgian soldiers would leave as soon as the U.N. entered the country. The second appeal to Soviet aid had the added effect of convincing many previously skeptical observers that Lumumba had communist sympathies, or perhaps even worse, that he was willing to ally himself with whichever superpower could help him at any given moment. The second explanation is closer to the truth; one must remember that Lumumba had no diplomatic or international experience, a failing which constantly undermined his negotiations with foreign powers.

²⁶ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 17

In order to understand Patrice Lumumba's actions as Prime Minister, one must remember the myriad problems that faced the Congo as soon as it became an independent nation with him as its first leader. Lumumba believed that the interests of the Congo were best served by a single nation, uniting the various tribes and regions, and he felt very strongly that the Belgians that had victimized the country for so long must not be a part of that set-up, perhaps an unrealistic goal considering the depth of Belgian interests in Katanga. Unfortunately, Lumumba did not have the political or military power to realize this dream on his own, and his vision did not match up with that of the U.S. or U.S.S.R. The very existence of the Congo was threatened by the secession of Katanga less than two weeks into Lumumba's term, at which point he went to extraordinary measures to protect a unified and independent Congo, measures that included appealing to both sides of the Cold War power divide for assistance.

It is hard to know whether Lumumba would have preferred capitalism or communism, only that he was willing to accept either in exchange for the military aid that would allow him to recapture Katanga or to face the long list of threats to his power that would come afterwards. Lumumba was impatient and impetuous, quickly cycling back and forth between possible sponsors, isolating himself from so many potential allies. He did not understand the stakes of the Cold War for the U.S. or the U.N. or the Soviet Union well enough to recognize that neither side would give him what he needed right away, and that his vacillations were undermining his goals. Lumumba was not devoted to communism in the way that many U.S. officials under both Eisenhower and Kennedy suspected he was, yet his ill-considered threats and single-minded devotion to his own goals made him an undesirable foreign leader just the same.

Indeed, Lumumba was a wild card, and the United States began to feel that its interests would not be best-served by his continued leadership in the Congo. This perspective was first articulated in writing by William Burden, the U.S. Ambassador in Brussels, on July 19, 1960, less than three weeks into the existence of an independent Congo. Burden's analysis was that Lumumba had established himself as hostile to the West and defiant towards the U.N., with the result that U.S. interests in the "Congo and Africa generally" were threatened by his regime. He proposed that "a principal objective of our political and diplomatic action must therefore be to destroy [the] Lumumba government as now constituted, but at [the] same time we must find or develop another horse to back which would be acceptable in [the] rest of Africa and defensible against Soviet political attack."²⁷ Burden goes on to suggest that U.S. policy in the Congo should focus on undermining Lumumba in all arenas: among the Congolese citizens, other African leaders, Parliament and the provincial governments. He does not demonstrate much concern for the details of replacing the increasingly popular Prime Minister. Burden notes the technical supremacy of the President in the Congolese government and concludes that even as "weak as [Kasavubu] has shown himself to be, he would seem to be [the] best bet for [the] immediate future."²⁸

Allen Dulles would go on to present a less extreme version of these views, telling the National Security Council on July 21 that "in Lumumba we were faced with a person who was a Castro or worse. We believe that he is in the pay of the Soviets." Dulles went on to outline his specific suspicions about Lumumba's motives, saying that the Belgian Communist Party must be incentivizing his behavior. Dulles declared that "it is safe to go

²⁷ Telegram from Burden to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:330

²⁸ Telegram from Burden to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:332

on the assumption that Lumumba has been bought by the Communists; this also, however, fits with his own orientation.”²⁹

This perspective was not limited to the Eisenhower Administration. W. Averell Harriman, in a 1960 memo to Kennedy, then a candidate, described Lumumba as “a rabble rousing speaker. He is a shrewd maneuverer who has clever left wing advisers, with the aid and encouragement of Czech and Soviet ambassadors.” Harriman goes on to explain that Lumumba believes that he can successfully bring Katanga back into the fold, as “he of course counts on full support from the USSR.”³⁰ Kennedy certainly valued Harriman’s opinion; the latter had been U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union during World War II, had been a candidate for the Democrats’ presidential nomination twice, and would go on to become an Ambassador-at-Large and an Assistant Secretary of State under Kennedy.

Harriman was far from alone among Kennedy’s closest advisors. G. Mennen Williams, Kennedy’s highly publicized pick for Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, called Lumumba “a clever anti-white rabble-rouser” and “foremost among” the “leftist radicals” in the Congo.³¹ Williams stops short of labeling Lumumba as a communist, while noting that it is difficult to tell the difference between communism and “hyper-nationalist, anti-‘colonialist’, Marxist thinking” in Africa.³² In a section entitled “The Problem of Lumumba,” Kennedy’s Task Force on Africa wrote that “Lumumba is attacked by critics as opportunistic, dishonest, frenetic and a would-be dictator,” a

²⁹ Memo of National Security Council Meeting, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:338-9

³⁰ Memo from Harriman to Kennedy, President’s Office Files, Box 114, Folder 5a

³¹ Analytical Chronology 1/25/61, President’s Office Files, Box 114, Folder 14

³² Analytical Chronology 1/25/61, President’s Office Files, Box 114, Folder 14

position from which they conspicuously do not dissent.³³ The same Task Force suspected that “The Soviet Union is ready to give unilateral assistance (quite apart from the UN) to any regime friendly to its advances. It is probably giving substantial aid to the pro-Lumumba government in Stanleyville” that would arise after Lumumba’s break with Kasavubu.³⁴

Yet the opinions were not unanimous. In the face of this cross-administration consensus on Lumumba’s leftist sympathies, Robinson McIlvaine, Timberlake’s deputy in Leopoldville, offered a divergent view, one that is much closer to the truth. He noted that “Lumumba is an opportunist and not a Communist. His final decision as to which camp he will eventually belong will not be made by him but rather will be imposed upon him by outside forces.”³⁵ The analysis Lawrence Devlin, in his capacity as CIA Station Chief in Leopoldville, was insightful, even if not totally accurate. “Embassy and station believe Congo experiencing classic communist effort takeover government... Whether or not Lumumba actually commie or just playing commie game to assist his solidifying power, anti-West forces rapidly increasing power Congo.”³⁶ Kennedy’s Task Force on Africa put it best, “The danger of renewed Soviet intervention in the Congo affair is serious. There is, however, a tendency to oversimplify the situation by superimposing on the Congo crisis a neat pro-Communist vs. anti-Communist frame of reference.”³⁷ Unfortunately, the officials of the Kennedy Administration, for whom those comments were intended, did not take them to heart.

³³ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

³⁴ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

³⁵ Telegram from McIlvaine to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:356

³⁶ Qtd. in U.S. Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* (New York: Norton, 1976), 14

³⁷ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

The widespread feeling of disdain for Lumumba was complicated when he came to the United States for a series of meetings starting July 24, first at the U.N. in New York, and then in Washington. Although he continued to have major differences of opinion with Hammarskjold on the role of U.N. forces in his country, the two were able to agree on a technical aid package and Lumumba announced that he was “satisfied” with the actions of the Security Council so far. Responding to a question about seeking Soviet aid, Lumumba tried to explain his position within the Cold War conflict, “For us, for the Congolese people, the Soviet Union is a people, a nation, like any other nation. Ideological questions are of no interest to us. Our policy of positive neutralism recommends contacts with all nations.”³⁸ Lumumba was trying to explain that he was willing to seek any avenue to secure the assistance he needed to assure a strong and stable Congo, just as McIlvaine had thought.

After his conciliatory appearance in New York, Lumumba met with Herter and Under Secretary of State C. Douglas Dillon in Washington. Herter and Dillon hoped to establish that all foreign aid to the Congo should be administered through the United Nations, a policy that the U.S. hoped would effectively block any aid from the Soviet Union. Lumumba was respectful, but he repeatedly returned to the subject after the American representatives tried to close it. Dillon reported feeling that the Prime Minister “was just not a rational being” and that he seemed to be “an irrational, almost ‘psychotic’ personality.” He concluded that “this was an individual whom it was impossible to deal with.”³⁹

³⁸ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 35

³⁹ Qtd. in U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 53

Lumumba's erratic personal added to Dillon's grim view of the possibility of working with him. When Lumumba arrived in Washington, he asked a State Department officer to provide him with a blonde female companion for the evening. He asked for a gun to protect himself, apparently on the advice of the CIA's Leopoldville Station Chief, Lawrence Devlin.⁴⁰ And he smoked hemp in his room at the Blair House, leading some American officials to conclude that he was a "drug addict."⁴¹ These factors, combined with Lumumba's especially effusive praise of Khrushchev and the Soviet people, contributed to Herter's belief that "Lumumba's intentions and sympathies [are] unclear, and evidence exists that he will not prove satisfactory."⁴² It was around this time, at a Pentagon meeting attended by representatives from the Departments of State and Defense as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CIA, that Dillon recalled first hearing about the possibility of assassinating Lumumba, although in this instance such a course of action was quickly dismissed.⁴³

That restraint would not continue for long, however. One member of the National Security Council staff, Robert H. Johnson, recollected that at one meeting, "President Eisenhower said something—I can no longer remember his words—that came across to me as an order for the assassination of Lumumba."⁴⁴ He was shocked, both by Eisenhower's announcement and by the lack of reaction of others in the room, to the extent that he admitted that he "had some doubts" about Eisenhower's meaning. Further evidence comes from the August 25 meeting of the Special Group, a subcommittee within the National Security Council which included Allen Dulles. Eisenhower's Special

⁴⁰ Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 39

⁴¹ Qtd. in Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 39

⁴² Telegram from Herter to Burden, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:383

⁴³ U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 54

⁴⁴ U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 55

Assistant for National Security Affairs, Gordon Gray reported that “his associates had expressed extremely strong feelings on the necessity for very straightforward action in this situation.”⁴⁵ Several officials later testified that “associates” was used as a euphemistic term for Eisenhower. The Special Group went on to decide “that planning for the Congo would not necessarily rule out ‘consideration’ of any kind of activity which might contribute to getting rid of Lumumba.”⁴⁶

Devlin explained that in late September, he met a CIA agent identified only as “Joe from Paris,” apparently an accomplished scientist, who delivered a variety of poisons to Leopoldville. Joe from Paris explained that Devlin had a great deal of latitude in choosing how to eliminate Lumumba, provided that the U.S. was not implicated. In response to Devlin’s concerned questions, Joe from Paris said that his orders had come from “the highest authority,” specifically President Eisenhower.⁴⁷ Devlin explained that he felt “it was morally wrong for me or anyone under my orders to kill Lumumba, an act that I could not justify by any argument or rationalization.”⁴⁸ Devlin’s account of himself as a lone opponent of violence should invite skepticism, since he never expressed his qualms to superiors. Ultimately, though, the delays in the program and the fact that Devlin almost certainly did not participate in Lumumba’s eventual death give some credence to his story.

Ultimately, it is difficult to establish conclusively whether vague comments by Eisenhower were intended to be used as assassination orders or not. It is certainly easy to imagine that such a lack of precision was intended to maintain plausible deniability for

⁴⁵ U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 60

⁴⁶ U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 60

⁴⁷ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, xi

⁴⁸ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 125

the President, especially in written documents and group meetings. But whether or not the order came from Eisenhower, it is clear that Allen Dulles undertook a plan to assassinate Lumumba using CIA resources. On August 26, Dulles sent a cable to Devlin which made his position clear. He explains that the top levels of government agree that “the inevitable result” of Lumumba’s continued rule “will at best be chaos and at worst pave the way to communist takeover of the Congo.” He orders that Lumumba’s “removal must be [a] urgent and prime objective and that under existing conditions this should be a high priority of our covert action.”⁴⁹ Dulles made his intentions even clearer in instructions to Devlin on September 24, shortly before the arrival of Joe from Paris. “We wish to give every possible support in eliminating Lumumba from every possibility of resuming governmental position.”⁵⁰

In 1975, the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities looked into the role of the United States in assassinating Lumumba. The Committee, commonly known as the Church Committee after its chairman, Senator Frank Church, offered the following conclusion.

The evidence indicates that it is likely that President Eisenhower’s expression of strong concern about Lumumba...was taken by Allen Dulles as authority to assassinate Lumumba...the CIA’s clandestine service formulated a plot to assassinate Lumumba. The plot proceeded to the point that lethal substances and instruments specifically intended for use in an assassination were delivered by the CIA to the Congo Station. There is no evidence that these instruments of assassination were actually used against Lumumba.⁵¹

This is perhaps the greatest difference in the Congo policies of the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations. Under Eisenhower, the CIA was quick to investigate the possibility of using assassination to deal with an inconvenient foreign leader. There is no

⁴⁹ U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 15

⁵⁰ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 124

⁵¹ U.S. Senate Select Committee, *Alleged Assassination Plots*, 13

evidence that either Kennedy or his advisers seriously considered the possibility of killing any of the numerous leaders, including Gizenga, Tshombe or Ileo, who caused the United States trouble from time to time. The CIA did not even inform Kennedy of its old plans when his Administration took office in January 1961, even though Lumumba was in enemy hands by that point. Indeed, the CIA was not particularly active in the Congo during Kennedy's presidency, despite his eagerness to use their skills in other crisis areas. It should be noted that the CIA has sometimes been implicated in the plane crash that killed Dag Hammarskjold in September 1961, but such accounts are not credible.

At first glance, it is difficult to know what to make of this major discrepancy in Congo policy between two Administrations whose objectives will be shown to have been so similar. Kennedy, after all, demonstrated a willingness to use assassination to deal with problematic leaders in Cuba and South Vietnam. One must come to the conclusion that Kennedy eschewed politically-motivated murder in the Congo not out a sense of morality, but because it did not fit his needs. The situation was dramatically different when the Kennedy Administration took office, as Lumumba had been taken prisoner, and, it was later revealed, killed, just before Kennedy's Inauguration. The United States emerged largely unscathed after the revelation of Lumumba's death, but more suspicious deaths would have undoubtedly increased scrutiny of American actions.⁵² This was an unacceptable situation for a President whose reputation was based on the support of other African states.

The situation changed dramatically on September 5, although it was not immediately clear what effect the shift would have on U.S. interests. President Kasavubu

⁵² Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 236

took to the airwaves to dismiss Prime Minister Lumumba, who had “betrayed his trust.”⁵³ The key factor in Kasavubu’s action was that Lumumba had secured ten Soviet airplanes to use in his campaign against Katanga, an action which the President felt undermined the international position of the Congo. Kasavubu then charged Joseph Ileo, the President of the Senate, with the formation of a new government. Lumumba responded almost immediately, with his own radio address which denied that the President was empowered to dismiss him and reminded listeners that Kasavubu only held his position because of the electoral victory of Lumumba’s MNC party. Lumumba accused Kasavubu of “high treason” as part of a “plot mounted by Belgian and French imperialists,” and declared that Kasavubu’s functions as head of state would be assumed by Parliament.⁵⁴ It is worth noting that the Constitution which the Congo inherited from Belgium does provide for the President to dismiss the Prime Minister at his discretion.⁵⁵

This confusing back-and-forth was complicated by the fact that the U.N. was in the process of changing its primary representative in the Congo. The U.N. had never intended that Ralph Bunche would remain in Leopoldville indefinitely, and he was to be replaced by Rajeshwar Dayal, a diplomat from non-aligned India and a favorite of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Dayal arrived on September 6 with serious doubts as to the legality of Kasavubu’s actions, but he was not yet in charge of U.N. operations in the Congo. That job was held on a temporary basis by Andrew Cordier, executive assistant to the Secretary-General, who was among many U.N. officials relieved to see Lumumba potentially being replaced. Cordier took the extraordinary step of using U.N. soldiers to

⁵³ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 71

⁵⁴ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 71-2

⁵⁵ Memo to Kennedy on Legal and Constitutional Positions of Kasavubu and Lumumba, President’s Office Files, Box 114, Folder 7

occupy and hold both the airport and the radio station in Leopoldville, thus denying their use to both Kasavubu and Lumumba. Cordier's move only appeared to be neutral, however, since he was aware that the lack of access would damage Lumumba's cause more; Kasavubu could use Radio Brazzaville across the Congo River and his supporters were concentrated around the capital, not in far-off Stanleyville, a plane ride away.⁵⁶ The decision not only provided ammunition to claims from the Soviet Union or from African states that the U.N. was working to overturn Lumumba's election, but it also served to establish a stalemate between Leopoldville and Stanleyville that would last almost a year.

Although Lumumba was not in a position to resolve the conflict, he began receiving widespread support, both from the Congolese Parliament and from other independent states of Africa. The most prominent among those was Ghana, who contributed the most significant number of troops, which President Kwame Nkrumah threatened to withdraw if Lumumba was prevented from using the radio station.⁵⁷ Dayal also worked to improve Lumumba's position after he took over from Cordier on September 8, quickly reopening the radio station and allowing civilian traffic at the airport.

Meanwhile, the Americans were souring on Kasavubu almost as fast as they had done with Lumumba. The President met with Ambassador Timberlake and Averell Harriman, in Africa on a fact-finding mission for the Kennedy campaign, on September 9. Harriman expressed his concern that Lumumba had won victories in Parliament, and "declared anti-Lumumba forces had to have courage to stand up and be counted and not collapse as they appeared to have done in Senate...such parliamentary victory indicated

⁵⁶ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 75

⁵⁷ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 86

to outside world that Lumumba was being supported by government.”⁵⁸ Timberlake was particularly unimpressed by Kasavubu’s weak responses to his and Harriman’s questions about how to extend his control given the circumstances. At one point, Kasavubu turned back on the questioner to ask for advice, and at other he was “vague and could only state right was on his side.”⁵⁹

It is telling that the Eisenhower Administration allowed such access to Harriman, even allowing him to participate in discussions between an Ambassador and a foreign head of state. Harriman was, after all, working for Eisenhower’s Democratic rival and had run for president as a Democrat in both 1952 and 1956. A memo to Eisenhower, prepared by the President’s Assistant Staff Secretary and son, John S.D. Eisenhower, uses information reported by Harriman as valuable intelligence on the country: “Harriman’s talks with Congolese leaders convince him that we can expect little if anything to be done in parliamentary form against Lumumba.”⁶⁰ This can perhaps be seen as a sign of a less polarized political elite in 1960, but it is also compelling evidence of the similarity of the outlook of Eisenhower and Kennedy, as both leaders used the same evidence, gathered during Harriman’s 1960 tour of Africa, to guide their thinking. Another example demonstrating this principle is Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., who ran against Kennedy first for a U.S. Senate seat from Massachusetts in 1952, and then as Richard Nixon’s vice-presidential candidate in 1960. As Eisenhower’s Ambassador to the United Nations, he played a major role in how the U.N. responded to the Congo Crisis, but Kennedy would soon choose him to be Ambassador to South Vietnam, where his criticism of Ngo Dinh Diem encouraged Kennedy to support his overthrow in 1963. With the same men

⁵⁸ Telegram from Timberlake to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:471

⁵⁹ Telegram from Timberlake to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:471

⁶⁰ Paper Prepared by John S.D. Eisenhower, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:486

advising both Eisenhower and Kennedy, it is unlikely that their foreign policies would end up being dramatically different.

Once Harriman left to deliver his report to Kennedy, Timberlake's frustration with Kasavubu boiled over, and he stated things more forcefully with a spectacularly mixed metaphor. "Kasavubu acts more like a vegetable every day while Lumumba continues display brilliant broken field running. In spite number of constructive suggestions given Kasavubu and Ileo, they seem incapable of any actions even when they have situation literally in hand."⁶¹ Lumumba had demonstrated that ability to respond to the unexpected when he had been arrested and briefly held by army officers who called for his resignation. Upon his release, he returned to Parliament, where he was granted special powers in a joint meeting of both houses. His opponents noted that most of the opposition was absent and that armed pro-Lumumba forces inside the building served to intimidate those who were present. In response, Kasavubu adjourned Parliament for a month and declared its actions illegal.

Events in the Congo took another unexpected turn on the night of September 14, when the chief of staff of the army, Colonel Joseph Mobutu, declared that the army would be taking power. International observers had not pegged Mobutu as a possible leader up to this point, and he was known more as a lackey of Lumumba than as an independent thinker.⁶² As part of this move, he explained that he was neutralizing Kasavubu and Lumumba, and would ask the first generation of Congolese students to go abroad for university study to return home and run the country in a nonpartisan fashion through the end of the year. Most crucially in American eyes, Mobutu expelled the

⁶¹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 87

⁶² Kalb, 134

embassies of the U.S.S.R. and Czechoslovakia, ending diplomatic relations between the Congo and the Eastern Bloc. In this action, Mobutu showcased a pro-Western bent that had made the CIA notice him and encourage his coup.

Mobutu's coup escalated a war of words between the United States and the Soviet Union. Eisenhower had previously made a public statement that "the United States deplores the unilateral action of the Soviet Union in supplying aircraft and other equipment for military purposes to the Congo." He added that the U.N.'s objectives were "threatened by the Soviet action, which seems to be motivated entirely by the Soviet Union's political designs in Africa."⁶³ Khrushchev lambasted the West when he came to New York to address the General Assembly on September 23, accusing the "colonialists" of resorting "to every possible means of overthrowing that Government. They set out to secure the establishment of a puppet government."⁶⁴

The controversy between the Kasavubu and Lumumba factions continued without real resolution, despite Mobutu's desire to neutralize all involved parties, until November 8, when President Kasavubu made his own address at the General Assembly. Claiming he was the sole legal ruler of the Republic of the Congo, Kasavubu proclaimed his authority to name the country's delegation to the U.N., a maneuver that the United States strongly supported. On November 22, the General Assembly voted narrowly to seat Kasavubu's delegation, marking a major blow for Lumumba and the Soviets.⁶⁵ His rival was acknowledged as the rightful leader of the country, and so Lumumba made the extraordinary move of leaving U.N. protection in Leopoldville to drum up support in Stanleyville. For four days after he snuck past the U.N. lines on November 27, no one

⁶³ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 113

⁶⁴ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 121

⁶⁵ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 155

was able to locate Lumumba, even as the U.S. scrambled to stop him from setting up a rival government in Orientale Province. On December 2, the Congolese Army announced that it had captured Lumumba and a group of his supporters in Kasai. He was returned to Leopoldville, showing clear evidence of having been beaten, and then attacked again by angry troops, all in front of a group of news reporters. Timberlake expressed concerns mostly about the public relations aspect of such a spectacle. General Carl von Horn, head of U.N. forces in the Congo, summed up the U.N. reaction thusly, “A small minority were plainly alarmed and dismayed. But most of us felt quite rightly that there was now a genuine chance of the Congo returning to some degree of tranquility.”⁶⁶ This kind of reaction to the public beating of a national leader, by the head of a U.N. operation, demonstrates the depth of discontent against Lumumba by this point.

With Lumumba incarcerated, Antoine Gizenga, the disciple of Lumumba and former Deputy Prime Minister, announced that he considered the legal government of the Congo to reside with him in Stanleyville, in the Lumumbist stronghold of Orientale Province. On December 25, forces from Stanleyville seized a garrison in Kivu and claimed control of the provincial government. In early January of 1961 they went even further south, seizing the town of Manono in Katanga after joining forces with local anti-Tshombe troops. Neither the soldiers led by Mobutu nor the U.N. forces demonstrated any interest in challenging these moves for almost a year.

Meanwhile, Lumumba was being held at the army facility in Thysville, near the capital and the site of the initial mutiny of the Force Publique that had set off the crisis. On January 13, the garrison at Thysville mutinied once again, this time with demands of better pay. Lumumba was even freed for a matter of hours, but opted to return to captivity

⁶⁶ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 163

rather than take a ministerial post in Ileo's government.⁶⁷ Kasavubu was able to stifle the revolt with the promise of a major pay raise, but he was understandably concerned that his charismatic rival was being held by potentially disloyal soldiers. As such, he ordered Lumumba moved to Elisabethville on January 17. The scene when the plane landed in Katanga was grim: six U.N. soldiers from Sweden stood on guard at the airport, not acting when over one hundred Katangese troops surrounded the airplane that had carried Lumumba. Three blindfolded prisoners, including the deposed Prime Minister, disembarked, being abused by the Katangese forces as Belgian officers looked on. A U.N. investigation later concluded that Lumumba was probably killed that night as he arrived in Elisabethville, but Tshombe continued to act as if he was holding Lumumba as a captive until February 13.

Between Lumumba's initial capture on December 2, 1960 and the announcement of his death on February 13, 1961, the framework for American response changed. John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as President on January 20, 1961, yet at that point he and the members of his Administration naturally believed Lumumba to be alive. Thus, the actions of the Kennedy Administration during its transition period and first month in office provide valuable insights into their views of Lumumba and the threat he may have posed to U.S. interests. Kennedy's Task Force on Africa, writing during this period, concluded that "currently there is no viable alternative to the Kasavubu-Mobutu regime."⁶⁸ The Task Force also simplified the Kasavubu-Lumumba schism:

In terms of contemporary African political issues, Kasavubu has come to symbolize the following: federal government based on tribalism; cooperation with Belgium; resistance to the Soviet bloc; suspicion of the Nkrumah approach to pan-Africanism. Lumumba, in turn, has symbolized: unitary government based on

⁶⁷ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 184

⁶⁸ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

centralism; hostility to Belgium; a willingness to accept strong Soviet support; warm approval for the pan-African ideal.⁶⁹

Of course, Kasavubu represented only the positions that the U.S. would support. G. Mennen Williams explained that the situation represented the worst nightmare for U.S. interests: “The consolidation of Gizenga’s power in Orientale province confronted the U.S. with a danger of ‘separatism’ in the Congo which was, this time, not anti-Lumumba and anti-Communist (as in Katanga and Kasai) but pro-Lumumba and Communist-supported.”⁷⁰

The members of the Task Force mirrored Allen Dulles’ language about the permanence of Lumumba’s threat. “As long as he is alive, Lumumba promises to be a force to reckon with.”⁷¹ The conundrum of America’s Congo policy was appropriately summed by an official at the State Department’s Congo Desk in January 1961. “We dare not accept new elections in the Congo... We dare not accept the convocation of the Parliament... We dare not even see Lumumba included in a coalition government for fear that he could come to dominate the cabinet. For a country that subscribes to the democratic creed, this is a remarkable predicament.”⁷² And the predicament would now rest on John F. Kennedy’s shoulders.

⁶⁹ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

⁷⁰ Analytical Chronology 1/25/61, President’s Office Files, Box 114, Folder 14

⁷¹ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

⁷² Qtd. in Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 34

Chapter Two:

LEOPOLDVILLE

Events in the first month of 1961 might have prompted outside observers to predict a dramatically different course for the U.S. in the Congo going forward. The leadership situations of both nations changed with the election of John F. Kennedy and the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, in all likelihood taking place just a few days apart in January 1961, seeming to reshape the landscape in the Congo fundamentally. Yet between January and August 1961, the Kennedy Administration followed in the footsteps of its predecessor by misjudging communist (and particularly Soviet) strength, failing to confront Belgium and, most crucially, dictating from Washington which candidate should take over the leadership of the Congo. These moves demonstrate that the primary concern of the United States throughout this period was its own interest, no matter who was serving as its president.

The fact that the transition of power in both the United States and the Congo did not lead to major changes bears explanation. As Kennedy's Task Force on Africa told him, "the advent of a new Administration" marked an excellent chance to reevaluate U.S.

policy in the Congo.¹ That is especially true as the death of Lumumba, beloved by very few of the Westerners who came into contact with him, should have allowed Kennedy to chart a new path free of the perceived threat of a Lumumbist state in the heart of Africa. Yet the expulsion of Soviet diplomats and the murder of the leading radical voice in the Congo did little to assuage fears of a communist takeover. Frustrating communist advances was still the primary goal of America's policy toward the Congo.

The similarities are even more surprising considering that the two Administrations arrived at their policies from different precedents that they simply elided into a single threat: Eisenhower's advisers feared the specter of communism in Europe, while Kennedy's saw it advancing in the developing world.² In responding to the Congo, top government officials found precedent for the situation there in nations that had been victim to communist insurgents (Czechoslovakia or Greece for Eisenhower's men, Laos and Cuba for the younger generation), perhaps not even considering that there was virtually no Eastern Bloc presence in the Congo after the ascent of Mobutu. Even this distinction might have led to a different perspective on the Congo, a state where the radical elements were not directed from Moscow as they had been in Eastern Europe, yet American officials once again imagined communism as monolithic. On the eve of his inauguration, Kennedy's advisers in the Task Force on Africa looked at the Soviet strategy "to pull a growing number of African states toward pro-Bloc neutralism...the Bloc will intervene whenever opportunities develop to disrupt existing relationships between African states and the West, and to support dissident or radical leaders."³ This

¹ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

² Stephen R. Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo, 1960-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 134

³ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

assessment is valid, but it had little relevance to the new situation in the Congo and demonstrated a dangerous way of thinking about neutralism, which closely resembled Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' previous judgment, in 1956, that neutralism in the developing world was "a transitional stage to communism."⁴

In their aforementioned report, dated December 30, 1960, the members of the Task Force concluded that "the Soviet Union is ready to give unilateral assistance (quite apart from the UN) to any regime friendly to its advances. It is probably giving substantial aid to the pro-Lumumba government in Stanleyville."⁵ However, Soviet sources reveal that Khrushchev refused to provide aid to Gizenga after Lumumba's imprisonment despite frantic requests for "direct Soviet interference." On December 14, 1960, only days after setting up his government in Stanleyville, Gizenga asked the Soviets "immediately, without delay, to help us in military equipment and foodstuffs," as "Stanleyville Province is in serious danger."⁶ Not receiving a satisfactory response, a subsequent telegram called out the Russians for their "passivity" and asked "Why can the USSR not help the legitimate and democratic government that enjoys the support of the Congolese?"⁷ One can understand why the Task Force would have expected continued Soviet involvement, since they did not have access to these revealing exchanges, but in overestimating the danger of communist takeover, they were just continuing the mistakes of the previous Administration.

The first months of 1961 also saw the United States continue its policy of timidly expressing dissatisfaction with Belgium for keeping so many of its advisers in Katanga.

⁴ Qtd. in Thomas J. Noer, "New Frontiers and Old Priorities in Africa," in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 255

⁵ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

⁶ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 127

⁷ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 129

George Allen, Assistant Secretary of State under Eisenhower, had stated in 1956 that “all of the so-called colonial powers are our friends in the worldwide contest between the Free and Communist worlds.”⁸ While largely true, it is a problematic statement, reflecting a worldview destined to alienate the emerging nations of Africa against the Eisenhower Administration. It is just another reminder why so many in Africa were glad to see Kennedy, who had so effectively scored points against the Republicans for their record on the continent, take over as leader of the free world. Unfortunately, the Kennedy Administration did not live up to the hopes for a New Frontier in Africa. In the months of February to May 1961, Kennedy allowed the situation in the Congo to play out, while expressing reluctance to upset NATO allies in Brussels by pushing too hard on Katanga. It was only during the summer, when the Belgians elected a new government that recognized the tide was turning against Tshombe, that the U.N. began to take action with tacit American approval.⁹

Although Kennedy would later demonstrate his discomfort with a Belgian-supported Katanga, he showed a willingness to accept Tshombe’s unpopular secessionist regime in Elisabethville that belied his pre-inauguration reputation of strong opposition to continued European imperialism in Africa. But, like their predecessors under Eisenhower, officials in the Kennedy Administration were ready to deal with Tshombe, and even court him at times, because of the moderate, anti-radical presence that he could provide until the emergence of a permanent government acceptable to the U.S. It is curious that his decision not to address the problem of Belgium and Katanga for so long, particularly after Tshombe was implicated in Lumumba’s murder, did not do more

⁸ Qtd in Noer, “New Frontiers and Old Priorities in Africa,” 255

⁹ Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo*, 147

damage to his reputation among Africans. This seeming contradiction is best explained by Kennedy's predecessor; Africa had frequently been ignored by Eisenhower, and the promise of a change under Kennedy was enough to excuse some early indecision in his Presidency.

Indeed, on most of the important issues faced by the United States in the Congo Crisis, the course charted by Kennedy and his State Department owed a great deal to Eisenhower's policies of the previous year. The similarities go beyond the shared fear of Lumumba and exaggerated concern about Soviet intentions in the Congo or the mutual hesitance to place African concerns above European ones. Both Eisenhower and Kennedy determined that American interests would be best-served by choosing a Congolese Prime Minister based on U.S. criteria. While Eisenhower had refused to tolerate Lumumba and insisted on his replacement, by any means including murder, Kennedy was almost as dissatisfied with any of the potential leaders to be found in the Congo's numerous factions. Kennedy's Administration instead spent months of effort to prop up Cyrille Adoula, plucking him from relative obscurity even though the several factions already had established leaders, of which Adoula was not one.

Lumumba's death had meant the destruction, at least for the foreseeable future, of a unitary national party in the Congo. Tshombe was still ensconced in Katanga, Lumumba's successor Antoine Gizenga had control of the country around Stanleyville, and the Kasavubu-Mobutu government remained in power in Leopoldville, recognized by the U.N. as the legitimate government of the Congo. Another province, South Kasai, had also declared independence under Albert Kalonji, but it lacked the political or military strength of the three main groups. The Kennedy Administration's first goal was to

identify an acceptable successor for Lumumba in order to restore national unity. The Task Force on Africa “insisted on” a restored national government, based on the premise that a solution that left Katanga to Belgian mining interests would not be “regarded as ‘legitimate’ by many new African states.”¹⁰ However, Kennedy proved reluctant to abandon the familiarity of Moise Tshombe’s independent Katanga.

The Kennedy Administration’s choice for leadership, Cyrille Adoula, picked from outside the group of candidates already squabbling for power, reflected the same kind of decision-making that had predominated during the Eisenhower years. Once again, the U.S. would value stability and perceived pro-American tendencies while disregarding the fact that none of the numerous factions had coalesced around their candidate, making the process of installing him as Prime Minister an especially arduous task. At the same time, one of the benefits of choosing Adoula was that he was not so closely associated with Kasavubu or with the United States as to provoke a negative reaction from the Lumumbists under Gizenga or the Katangese.

The fragmentation of the Congo into several factions was not new, however, and the search for a viable candidate to replace Lumumba had begun well before his death. But Eisenhower was not the only one to become fed up with Lumumba, as the Prime Minister had also succeeded in alienating the United Nations, playing a crucial role trying to broker peace in the Congo. Lumumba’s intransigence regarding the immediate end of the Katanga secession had caused irreparable harm in his relationship with U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold. As early as August 1960, the U.S. and the U.N. had each privately expressed a desire to be rid of the meddlesome Lumumba and replace him with whomever else they could find.

¹⁰ Report of Task Force on Africa, Pre-Presidential Files, Box 1073, Folder 2

U.S. Ambassador Clare Timberlake surveyed the national scene, only to discover “no one with national stature” as an alternative to Lumumba. He went on to describe the most likely candidate, Kasavubu, as “a political zero” and “naïve, not very bright, lazy.”¹¹ At the same time, there was growing animosity between Hammarskjold’s representative Rajeshwar Dayal and a number of influential parties in the Congo, including foreign diplomats like Timberlake and British Ambassador Ian Scott. Timberlake had earlier cautioned his superiors at State not to acquiesce to the U.N. plan for an “accelerated Parliamentary solution in the Congo.”¹² Instead, the Eisenhower Administration would only be willing to consider a moderate, anti-communist government. Critically, both Administrations discounted concerns about Congolese self-determination and a functional state before fear of communist domination, either by the Soviets or by radical elements in the Congo itself.

As the Eisenhower Administration was leaving office, with Lumumba imprisoned but his death not yet announced, a Special National Intelligence Estimate found the situation to be very grim: “There is no indication that the Congo is developing a national leader, a national party, or a national consciousness. Political instability on a grand scale, probably leading to increased violence and other excesses, both organized and disorganized, appears to be the most likely prospect for the Congo for some time to come.”¹³ In the early days of January, it seemed that the hoped-for round table conference to decide on a new direction might materialize, but Kasavubu and Tshombe could not agree on a location. As such, Timberlake suggested that the Kasavubu faction in the

¹¹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 51-52

¹² Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 146

¹³ Special National Intelligence Estimate, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:3

Congo could privately form a cabinet to put in place as soon as Parliament met again.¹⁴ Earlier in the process, when the U.S. and the U.N. first began to organize replacements for Lumumba in earnest, the consensus choice had been for Joseph Ileo to continue on as Prime Minister. By January, Timberlake was pushing for an alternative choice, labor leader Cyrille Adoula, but acknowledged that he did not have “broad political support.”¹⁵ It is worth noting that Timberlake would declare that even the “most sympathetic observers know this country cannot govern itself in an intelligent fashion,” saying that the Congo was nowhere near achieving anything other than a “façade of democracy.”¹⁶ His suggestion was greeted with skepticism, as the State Department suggested another candidate, Justin Bomboko, while the revitalization of Ileo’s government, with a prominent military role for Mobutu, would be the back-up plan.

Timberlake’s defense of Adoula was a masterpiece of mismatched and apparently contradictory pieces of advice for the State Department. He opens by expressing his support for Adoula, noting he was just “as anti-Lumumbaist [sic] as the others including Bomboko, is energetic and has better general position among parliamentarians.” Next, Timberlake reminds the State Department of the limitations of America’s role. “In last analysis it will be Kasavubu and other Congolese who should and will decide makeup,” a curious comment from someone who did not accept that the Congolese could govern themselves and had actively pushed his chosen candidate in the preceding sentence.¹⁷ Finally, Timberlake openly wondered whether a change of government would even be in the United States’ interest. He suggested that the Afro-Asian bloc in the United Nations

¹⁴ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 178

¹⁵ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 145

¹⁶ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 146

¹⁷ Telegram from Timberlake to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:586

would not respond any better to a new government without parliamentary legitimacy than they had to the last one. He points out that that “Mobutu and CNA represent only relatively stable counter to return Lumumba at present and might have to assert themselves again if moderates fail” and that he had no desire to weaken the Mobutu regime.¹⁸ He ends by saying that American officials have “continued discussions with Mobutu, Ileo, and others” in order to set up a government acceptable to the United States and to the Congolese Parliament.¹⁹ It is difficult to say what Timberlake’s ultimate policy proscription is.

Rusk would later give Kennedy a biographical sketch of Adoula that is useful in understanding how American officials viewed him and why he was chosen as the best candidate.

He is an intelligent and well-balanced moderate...A forceful and articulate spokesman for the Congo, Adoula is strongly anti-communist. He has talked openly with the American Embassy in Leopoldville, which considers him one of the best prospects for top leadership in the Congo. He is one of the few leading Congolese who does not depend considerably on foreign advisers.²⁰

Rusk is also quick to note that Adoula was active in forming the Mouvement National Congolais, but had since ended his relationship with Lumumba, something sure to endear him to many Americans.

Although Lumumba’s murder did create an uncomfortable situation for the U.S., with fringe elements in the Congo suspecting not unreasonably that America had been involved in the killing, neither the United States nor the United Nations saw their credibility significantly damaged in Africa. Both U.S. and U.N. strove to insulate themselves even further by moving for immediate action on a U.N. Resolution on the

¹⁸ Telegram from Timberlake to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:588

¹⁹ Telegram from Timberlake to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:588

²⁰ Memo from Rusk to Kennedy, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Congo General 5/61-9/61

Congo. The Afro-Asian coalition of Ceylon, the U.A.R. and Liberia introduced a resolution to give the U.N. greater authority to act in the Congo. However, this draft resolution had some provisions with which the U.S. was uncomfortable. Chief among these was its ban on foreign military personnel, but not materiel, a condition which the U.S. felt was directly unfairly towards Katanga, which needed greater Belgian troop strength, and not against possible shipment of Soviet Bloc arms to Stanleyville. The execution of Lumumba and other prisoners lent a sense of urgency to the Security Council meetings of February 1961 and prevented Adlai Stevenson from taking the time he wanted to alter the resolution to more closely mirror American desires.²¹ The resolution allowed for the “use of force, if necessary, in the last resort,”²² a restriction which Stevenson interpreted to suit American interests: “Clearly, this resolution means that force cannot be used until agreement has been sought by negotiation, conciliation and all other peaceful measures.”²³ His British counterpart, Sir Patrick Dean, went even further, saying he understood that force could only be used “to prevent a clash between hostile Congolese troops. There can be no question of empowering the United Nations to use its forces to impose a political settlement.”²⁴

U.S. officials were quick to praise the effectiveness of the Resolution in moving the various anti-communist factions closer together. Williams’ revised Analytical Chronology noted “that the Security Council resolution of February 21 was bringing

²¹ Analytical Chronology, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis 3/9/61

²² Catherine Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events, January 196-December 1961* (Fair Lawn, NJ: Oxford University Press, 1962), 35

²³ Analytical Chronology, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis 3/9/61

²⁴ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 236

about a greater degree of Congolese unity.”²⁵ Williams attributed the agreement that “not only Kasavubu, Ileo, Tshombe and Kalonji but also Gizenga” would attend a summit in Tanarive, Madagascar to the Resolution. He suggested that “the threat of disarmament of the Congolese factions appeared to be impelling them to try to come to terms.”²⁶

The Tananarive conference of March 8-12, organized by the participants themselves and not by U.S. or U.N. representatives, did not end up including the presence of Gizenga. Instead, Gizenga showed off his instability and lack of political acumen by denouncing the meeting after previously telling Dayal that he would attend. Tshombe held sway amongst his supposed equals, with his significant mineral wealth making him the only leader with cash on hand, a tool which he used to successfully prevail upon the other leaders into agreeing to a plan for a federal system with a much weaker central government. This system would be of greatest benefit to Katanga, with its unmatched economic strength, but Timberlake rightly noted it was also “better adapted to tribal realities.”²⁷

Tshombe’s position, and the position of Katanga itself, was a precarious one. Other African states, particularly the more radical group exemplified by Guinea and Ghana, looked with suspicion upon the secession of Katanga and its cozy relationship with its former Belgian overlords. In a conversation with Kennedy, the leader of Nyasaland, Dr. Hastings K. Banda, expressed his feelings about Tshombe: “everyone in Africa knew he was a stooge of Belgian and other mining interests in Katanga. He had no

²⁵ Analytical Chronology, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis 3/9/61

²⁶ Analytical Chronology, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis 3/9/61

²⁷ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 246

standing as an African leader.”²⁸ The American ambassador in Moscow characterized Khrushchev’s assessment in much the same terms: “He seemed particularly bitter about Tshombe, whom he characterized as stooge of Belgian mining monopoly.”²⁹

At the same time, American officials in both the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations looked favorably on Katanga, as its friendship with the West was thought to guarantee a better position for the U.S. Eisenhower’s State Department had worked with Belgium to provide suggestions for Tshombe to improve his international image, by publicizing attempts to confer with other Congolese leaders and by “minimizing more visible aspects Belgian influence Katanga.”³⁰ Until later in 1961, the reaction of Kennedy officials remained the same. Timberlake thought it better to focus first on ending the Katanga secession, with the expectation that Gizenga would not be able to stand up to a united Leopoldville-Elisabethville bloc. As he puts it, “If that did not make Gizenga realize his game was up and bring him back, he would eventually be under pressure which I doubt he could long resist.”³¹

The rest of the Administration did not agree with Timberlake’s assessment, however. With so much chaos in the rest of the Congo, and the United States dedicated to encouraging Adoula’s candidacy, American officials did not focus attention on the relatively stable and prosperous Tshombe regime in Katanga, where the threat to stability was more nebulous and long-term. Kennedy had already shown reluctance to upset the Belgians. The State Department realized that criticizing the Belgian military in Katanga would cause problems: “Ineluctably this will give us serious problems with Belgians and

²⁸ Memo of Conversation between Kennedy and Banda, FRUS, 1961-1963, 21:508-9

²⁹ Telegram from U.S. Embassy in Moscow to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:101

³⁰ Telegram from Canup to State Department, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:513

³¹ Telegram from Timberlake to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:131

will place yet another strain on NATO.”³² Only when these negotiations led to a government acceptable to Americans did U.S. and U.N. attention return to the problems caused by Tshombe’s secession. A member of the National Security Council staff summarized views expressed to him thusly. One might not like Tshombe, but “it was highly necessary that we be practical and realize that he is all we have; that there will be nothing after Tshombe goes.”³³

Tshombe’s status among the other Congolese leaders also began to falter after the Tananarive conference, with his compatriots recognizing the extent to which Tshombe’s plan would undermine their own power in the central government. The next summit meeting took place on April 24 in Coquilhatville in the Congo, with Gizenga once again declining the invitation to participate. The conference’s mandate was further limited when Tshombe left the conference two days later, convinced that the positions of other delegates were firmly set against him. In a rare show of unity, soldiers from both Leopoldville and Stanleyville intercepted him at the airport to prevent him from leaving the conference without the various leaders coming to an agreement. Tshombe’s status as a prisoner over the next few weeks remained unclear, but it was very telling that he did not return to Katanga in that time. It was not until May 7 that he was charged with high treason, specifically for participating in Lumumba’s murder.

The remaining Katangese government, including Tshombe’s second-in-command, Interior Minister Godefroid Munongo, sent a letter to Kennedy which reminded the President of his stated commitment to ‘Africa for the Africans.’ The letter requested that the United States be “faithful to its tradition of fighting for liberty and respect for right”

³² Telegram from Rusk to U.S. Embassy in Brussels, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:79

³³ Memo from Samuel E. Belk to Walt Rostow, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Congo General 5/61-9/61

and act to ensure Tshombe's liberation "because only in this case can we resume negotiations with leaders of other countries of former Belgian Congo."³⁴ The U.S. government took the position that Katanga was not a recognized independent state, and thus did not reply.

The United States was left in a difficult position, and followed the Eisenhower policy of wait and see. Neither Stevenson nor the State Department would do anything to encourage the release of Tshombe until the situation on the ground became clearer. During the same time that Tshombe was being arrested, Gizenga was making steady gains in strength. Gizenga had promised to attend any reconvening of Parliament in which his security was guaranteed by U.N. forces, but some officials saw this as a means of stalling for time, particularly after he had reversed his position on Tananarive. Kasavubu forced Gizenga's hand on May 12, announcing an imminent Parliamentary session in Leopoldville under U.N. protection. Gizenga responded by declaring Kasavubu's Parliament illegal and convening his own Parliament at the U.N. base in Kamina, with press, foreign diplomats, and Congolese troops all banned from the premises. It was difficult to take seriously Gizenga's desire for security, which was certainly genuine, when his own counterproposal was so preposterous. The consensus among knowledgeable observers was that Gizenga realized he probably did not have enough support among the deputies to carry the day, and so sought to discredit the more legitimate Leopoldville gathering. Again, Gizenga miscalculated, by not understanding the growing desire for a resolution and obviously stalling at a time where Kasavubu was moving toward a real possibility for a decision.

³⁴ Letter from Munongo to Kennedy, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Congo General 5/61-9/61

Once again, however, State Department officials needed the presence of all major factions for the decisions made to be viewed as legitimate. G. Mennen Williams and Chester Bowles were among those at State who felt that the best way to respond to the perceived communist threat in the Congo was to incorporate a few representatives of that element and encourage them to participate within the system. This was a clear departure from Eisenhower-era thinking, and Kennedy's improved relations with leftist leaders in Ghana and Guinea were the clearest example of this method. However, like many of the changes in the Kennedy Administration, the reality did not live up to the high expectations that Kennedy had created with his rhetoric. Indeed, the extent to which this represented a genuine change in perspective is called into question by the State Department recommendation that Gizenga be offered a "non-sensitive post in otherwise moderate cabinet with strong Prime Minister."³⁵ Ambassador Timberlake and officials in the Defense Department openly questioned whether even this largely ceremonial position was not too much of a capitulation to radical forces. As recently as May 10, Bowles had said of Gizenga, "we consider him completely responsive at present to foreign direction," a sentiment certainly not shared by the Soviets, whose earlier denial of aid meant that their influence with the enigmatic leader was minimal.³⁶

Timberlake's perspective was noted, but little more than that, as he would soon be removed from his position as part of a deal with Hammarskjold to replace the deeply unpopular Dayal. Despite his best efforts, Dayal had drawn scorn from virtually all parties, with Mobutu even threatening to assassinate him and use his own forces against the U.N. troops if Dayal returned to the Congo. The U.S. State Department had tried to

³⁵ Telegram from Bowles to Timberlake, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:143

³⁶ Telegram from Bowles to U.S. Mission at U.N., FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:136

secure his removal “on the ground that he is biased in favor of Lumumba,” a claim that Lumumba would have vigorously denied.³⁷ Recognizing that discretion was the better part of valor, Dayal resigned, but not before Hammarskjold secured the premature removal of his rivals, Timberlake and British Ambassador Scott, in exchange. The pro-Africa wing of the State Department must have felt like they had won a double victory by removing Dayal as well as the obstinate and outspoken Timberlake.

Timberlake’s disagreement with Administration policy on the involvement of Gizenga was only the latest in a long line of incidents, including a potentially disastrous recommendation to move a U.S. Navy task force in the Atlantic to the port of Matadi without anyone else’s authorization.³⁸ It is easy to see the limits of Kennedy’s supposed emphasis on Africa here, that during a period of civil war and fear of a communist takeover, the U.S. was willing to leave itself with an ambassador all summer. Edmund Gullion would succeed Timberlake, but he would be busy working on disarmament issues until the end of August, so the deputy chief of mission McMurtrie Godley was left to act in the capacity of ambassador for more than two months.

The low priority assigned to Africa was evident in the Vienna meeting between Kennedy and Khrushchev that June: issues related to the Congo were pushed aside in favor of Laos (where a peaceful settlement was reached) and Berlin (where the lack of agreement led up to the Berlin crisis and the erection of the Wall). The precedent of a neutral coalition government in Laos did lead the Kennedy team to believe that the Soviets would be willing to accept a similar solution in the Congo, where their position was even weaker. At the same time, the Gizengists privately acknowledged that they had

³⁷ Analytical Chronology, 1/25/61, President’s Office Files, Box 114, Folder 14

³⁸ Memo from McNamara to Rusk, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Congo General 1/61-4/61

overstepped their influence by trying to dictate so many factors of the Parliament meeting, and both of those factors encouraged the Kennedy Administration's established preference for a broad, legitimate government. Hammarskjold was able to secure a meeting between Adoula and a delegation from Stanleyville about security arrangements for Parliament. Adoula was also pursuing Tshombe, at the behest of the American embassy, with the understanding that Tshombe would be released from house arrest and given a position in the Cabinet if he would send his deputies to Leopoldville. Meanwhile, Mobutu was actively trying to prevent the involvement of Gizenga, hoping to stir up trouble by arresting numerous soldiers and civilians and cracking down on alleged "underground organizations of Lumumbists."³⁹

Even as that was happening, the U.N. was somehow able to convince the Stanleyville delegation they would be safe and all sides agreed to meet on June 26 at Lovanium University near Leopoldville. Mobutu even agreed to disarm his soldiers, explaining that he was willing to accept political decision made by the Kasavubu government. Tshombe soon held a press conference alongside Adoula, Mobutu and other representatives of the Leopoldville faction, announcing his release and further cooperation. Godley found himself almost immediately in a better position than his predecessor, with a more agreeable U.N. representative in Sture Linner and nascent alliance of moderate interests in Leopoldville and Elisabethville. Even so, Godley was convinced he needed to push the Congolese to act more quickly, as Gizenga continued to gather support and a rumor circulated that the Soviet Union had offered to establish an

³⁹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 268

embassy in Stanleyville. The short-lived Soviet mission in Stanleyville would eventually be set up covertly in a hotel room with bedsheets covering the windows.⁴⁰

The situation seemed to be resolving itself on June 24, when Tshombe left Leopoldville and signed an agreement with Ileo to end the secession in Katanga. Hammarskjold had explained that he and various Belgian diplomats were putting pressure on the Katangese delegation to attend so as to decrease the possibility of a Gizenga victory.⁴¹ But Tshombe immediately went back on his word once he had returned safe to Elisabethville, declaring that the secession would continue and that he might not even send his deputies and senators to Lovanium. U.S. officials noted that a Parliament convened without Tshombe's delegates had a real chance of granting power to Gizenga, so Rusk tried to increase the pressure on Tshombe to show up. Rusk told his representatives in Elisabethville to pass on his threats, that the U.N. would not accept a permanently separate Katanga and that "if Tshombe plans renege completely on Leopoldville agreement, demonstration such bad faith will cost him dearly in international standing."⁴²

The State Department, backed by the governments of crucial NATO allies France and Great Britain, urged caution, but Godley strongly disagreed, preferring the continuation of the aggressive pace he had adopted earlier. Williams summarized Godley's position for Rusk,

He believes that the present situation does not warrant the adoption of dilatory tactics at this time which would have their own dangers. He doubts Gizenga is strong enough to emerge as the dominant figure in the new government if the Leopoldville moderates adequately organize themselves. He therefore

⁴⁰ Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 169

⁴¹ Telegram from U.S. Mission at U.N. to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:150

⁴² Telegram from Rusk to Godley, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:154

recommends that we permit the present situation to continue to develop and that we refrain from pushing the "panic button" too soon.⁴³

He also rightly pointed out the difficulty of changing Kasavubu's mind on such an important issue on that late date. As such, members of Parliament from the Stanleyville contingent began to arrive on July 16, somewhat delayed from the original plans. For hardly the first time, Gizenga was noticeably absent; at first, his delegation claimed that he was merely a few days late because of illness but events would reveal that to be an unconvincing ruse.

The U.S. and the U.N. had even more reason to fret, as the moderate group had failed to coalesce around a single, clear leader. In Gizenga's absence, the Stanleyville group looked to Christophe Gbenye, Lumumba's old Interior Minister and Gizenga's frequent stand-in. Meanwhile, Ileo continued to refuse to resign his post to make room for Adoula, as America desperately hoped. The U.S. and U.N. officials in the Congo acted quickly to resolve these concerns. Godley met with Kasavubu on July 20, and explained that "moderates were without clear indication of President's wishes and they were currently group of fine men but who were wallowing in indecision and who did not have leader designated by Chief State." At this point, Kasavubu refused to prevail upon Ileo to resign against his will, but responded positively when Godley stroked his ego, telling him "there were times in nations' history when leaders such as himself had to lower themselves to negotiate with parliamentarians."⁴⁴

A day earlier, Linner had taken the extraordinary step of warning Kasavubu that he was going to "meddle in internal Congolese affairs"⁴⁵ and granted Kasavubu the use of

⁴³ Memo from Williams to Rusk, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:160

⁴⁴ Telegram from Godley to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:168

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 272

a U.N. helicopter to go back and forth to Lovanium and steer Parliament towards accepting Adoula as head of government. Linner went so far as to encourage Kasavubu to stay in constant contact with U.S. and U.N. representatives, and to heed their advice, to which the President agreed. Hammarskjold responded with a classic example of diplomatic double-talk, telling Linner never to intervene in internal affairs while adding that he would have done the same thing in the situation.⁴⁶

On July 24, a member of the Stanleyville delegation was elected President of the Assembly, a development which caused widespread consternation. Mobutu demanded that the U.N. turn over military control of the airport, a change sure to undermine any feeling of safety among the Gizengists, as their route home would have required them to pass through hostile armed forces. Linner recognized this and convinced Godley and the State Department to stand firm against Mobutu, at least temporarily. The election also caught the attention of Kennedy, and the President belatedly expressed his concern over the lack of an ambassador in Leopoldville. Rusk was moved to send Godley a message which underscored his concern about Gizenga becoming Prime Minister, and which gave Godley instructions to pressure Kasavubu to stall proceedings until Tshombe could be brought into the fold.

On July 22, even before these specific concerns arose, Rusk suggested “arranging for challenge of those parliamentarians whose credentials are dubious” in order for Godley to “gain time and yet not place upon Leopoldville leaders public blame for sabotaging parliament.”⁴⁷ But Rusk’s telegram of July 26 makes it clear that the United

⁴⁶ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 273

⁴⁷ Telegram from Rusk to Godley, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:169

States would only accept the best of all possible outcomes, urging Godley to do all he could to turn Parliament's focus away from choosing a leader.

Stakes so large, for reasons spelled out below, I wish you resort to delaying tactics along foregoing lines too soon rather than too late... In discussing reasons Gizenga-led government would be undesirable, you should stress following line. Gizenga would probably prove as disruptive an influence in Congo as Lumumba because he does not have the support of majority of the tribally divided Congolese... On other hand, Gizenga as parliamentary-confirmed Prime Minister would have support of large majority of nations and UN would be under pressure recognize him thus placing US in extremely difficult position.⁴⁸

For the second time on this subject, Godley disagreed with his superiors at State, this time overtly refusing his orders. Among other considerations, Godley was aware that the panic in the Congo had calmed down significantly on July 25, when a moderate candidate had been elected President of the Senate, evidence that the mood was turning against the perennially-absent Gizenga. Godley also attributed this surprising turn of events to the news being spread that Gizenga had ordered three more executions in Kivu.⁴⁹ In the end, though, the most meaningful change in policy resulted from the independent judgment of Godley, while the advice from Washington was strikingly similar to what it had been under Eisenhower.

Godley rightly calculated that it would not serve American interests to tie Leopoldville too closely with the widely-reviled regime in Elisabethville, and that Kasavubu would not be likely to respond positively to such coercion, which could even be used to the advantage of his radical opponents. He noted that "pressure from US to take positions they are reluctant to assume irritates them immensely and their irrational reactions frequently are against their best interests," pointing to the examples of Guinea (where France had been the state to miscalculate this factor) and Cambodia, and even that

⁴⁸ Telegram from Rusk to Godley, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:172-3

⁴⁹ Telegram from Goldey to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:175

of the Tshombe regime in Katanga.⁵⁰ He went on to note that a Gizenga victory was far from certain, and even if such an undesirable outcome did come to pass, the “ wisest though perhaps most frustrating course for US now to follow is to lie low in Congo.”⁵¹ Godley’s bold stand was made even more nerve-racking by the fact that the members of Parliament were tightly sequestered at Lovanium, with American officials only having access to information from their discussions through a few highly circuitous routes.

Godley’s thinking was ultimately vindicated in the aftermath of July 29, when Tshombe arrived in Brazzaville, just across the border from Leopoldville, with a small retinue not including Katangese members of Parliament. Tshombe made the bizarre decision to stay in Brazzaville only a few days before returning to Elisabethville on August 1, having accomplished virtually nothing. He did not meet with Kasavubu or join the Parliament at Lovanium, as was widely expected and indeed desired by the U.S. Ironically, this maneuver did much to spur agreement on the government, prompting the delegates at Lovanium to remain there, and shifting Kasavubu into high gear, seemingly thanks to a shared desire to spite the Katangese delegation. Kasavubu finally forced Ileo to resign and named Adoula Prime Minister, an appointment which was confirmed by both houses nearly unanimously, much to the surprise of outside observers. To the delight of the U.S. and the U.N., moderates controlled all of the key ministries except Interior, which had been given to Gbenye. Gizenga was installed in the prestigious but non-essential role of Deputy Prime Minister, leading Godley to declare that the new

⁵⁰ Telegram from Goldey to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:175

⁵¹ Telegram from Goldey to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:176

government was “as good as we could reasonably expect” and that their side had given away “the absolute minimum” needed to secure victory.⁵²

Rusk’s memo for the President reflected similar thinking, saying “we considered that the risks of Gizengist inclusion... would be less of a risk than leaving Gizenga in his Orientale redoubt where he is a standing invitation to Communist penetration and where his isolation tends to drive him closer to the Soviet Bloc.” Rusk set the stage for another hurdle in setting up a Congolese state acceptable to American interests, as “the next major task, would be greatly facilitated if the mineral-rich Katanga were to included in some workable way.” He ended with a response to Kennedy’s stated concern, by promising the imminent arrival of Gullion while describing Godley’s work in the absence of a permanent Ambassador as “excellent.”⁵³ Kennedy’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt Rostow added a supplement, laying out the possibility that “if Gizenga and the Katanga group agree to participate in the Adoula government in a relatively constructive manner... we could be witnessing the most encouraging new development since you became President.” Although Rostow acknowledged that the actions of leaders in Stanleyville and Elisabethville are unpredictable, “you should know that there is optimism all over town that the Congo situation is on its way toward solution.”⁵⁴

Reactions from the superpowers were restrained: the U.S. did not want to undermine the relatively neutral perception of Adoula, either in the Congo or in the international community. Godley recommended that the U.S. “assiduously avoid actions that might be interpreted locally as meddling internal Congolese affairs now nationalism

⁵² Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 276

⁵³ Memo from Rusk to Kennedy, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Congo General 5/61-9/61

⁵⁴ Memo from Rostow to Kennedy, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Congo General 5/61-9/61

running high and Congolese think they doing excellent job.”⁵⁵ Meanwhile the U.S.S.R. had realized that Gizenga’s national standing was probably lost when he had stubbornly refused to go to Lovanium. Gizenga’s self-defeating move had alienated the Soviets, so they were well-disposed to accept new leadership in the Congo, choosing to cut ties with a friendly but increasingly ineffective opposition movement. Soviet officials looked at the Adoula government “as the legitimate successor of the government headed by Lumumba,” and noted that “followers of Lumumba and Gizenga hold the majority of posts in it.”⁵⁶ Even after the new government was announced, with Gizenga playing a supposedly major role, he remained in Stanleyville amidst rapidly decaying support. As Godley pointed out, Gizenga’s “physical removal from scene and absence direct leadership have incited unfavorable comment many his former ardent supporters.”⁵⁷ Adoula made the bold decision to go to the stronghold of his adversary, where he received a reassuring welcome and convinced Gizenga to publicly recognize his government. Gizenga conspicuously left out any reference to future plans to go to Leopoldville.

Tshombe realized that he had put himself in a bad place, having been left out of the new national government while the U.S. and U.N. could finally turn their full attention to bringing him back to the fold. On August 3, he met with the U.S. consul in Elisabethville, William Canup, who observed that “Tshombe seemed shaken and appeared to be seeking desperately for way to protect stability of Katanga which he feels could be endangered by re-entry into Congo without adequate guarantees or by possible military action by Leopoldville Government.” He also reported that “Tshombe stated that

⁵⁵ Telegram from Godley to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:191

⁵⁶ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 170

⁵⁷ Telegram from Godley to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:190

he wants Katanga to stay in Congo and is ready participate in working out new constitution,” a position which had likely been inspired by Adoula’s stated commitment to returning Katanga to the Congo.⁵⁸

Little time had passed before American officials began to express concern that their hand-picked Prime Minister was leaning too far to the left. The concerns of Kennedy officials were not dissimilar to those raised by the Eisenhower Administration about Lumumba only a year earlier, but they are even more indefensible in the immediate aftermath of a concerted effort to back Adoula to the exclusion of more logical possibilities. Indeed, the very independence and nonalignment that had made Adoula an attractive candidate in the first place was now seen as a potential warning-sign. Philip M. Klutznick, a prominent businessman and future Secretary of Commerce, visited Leopoldville from August 6 to 11, leaving the country just over a week after the Adoula government was born. Already, he said he was “haunted by the strange feeling that the Adoula government may turn out to be...something extremely leftish or worse.” He noted that he spoke to other diplomats who “for somewhat different reasons expect a radical turn to the left.” It is a curious response, even more so after Klutznick praised Adoula as “the most impressive of all native Congolese we met. He is obviously sincere; impressively thoughtful; apparently mature.”⁵⁹ Klutznick acknowledges that his feeling is nothing more than a hunch, and it is apparent that he falls into the large group of analysts who remain unimpressed with the Congolese, after they have shown little evidence of being able to organize an effective government. Rusk asked Williams to check in on the newly-installed Adoula, and Williams came away impressed, enough to

⁵⁸ Telegram from Canup to State Department, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:181

⁵⁹ Memo from Philip M. Klutznick to Kennedy, National Security Files, Box 27a, Folder: Congo General 5/61-9/61

forestall the worrying for the time being. American focus had already shifted, after all, to the question of what was to be done with the bothersome Moise Tshombe in Katanga.

Chapter Three:

ELISABETHVILLE

The Congo had been dominated for almost a full year by contests over its leadership, and the thrust of American involvement had been first to remove Lumumba and then to find a suitable replacement. Even though those efforts had succeeded at Lovanium with the installation of Cyrille Adoula as head of government, the U.S. and the U.N. agreed that more work remained to be done. As many observers in the Congo and the rest of the world realized, the reunification with Katanga was an imperative for the legitimacy of Adoula's government. The resolution of the succession crisis in favor of the acceptable Cyrille Adoula allowed the West to turn its attention to the issue that had been necessarily relegated to the background for much of the Congo Crisis: using diplomacy or force to rein in the problematic province of Katanga.

Katanga's vast mineral wealth, in cobalt and copper, as well as smaller amounts of numerous other riches, had long set the province apart from the rest of the Congo. The mineral lode's value was enhanced even more by its accessibility, with much of it located only feet from the surface. Accordingly, Europeans had invested in hydroelectric power and railroads to facilitate mining in the region, and the company Union Minière had essentially governed the area on behalf of the disinterested Belgian government. As a result of these advantages, the Katangese enjoyed a somewhat higher standard of living

than other Congolese. By the time of independence, a black ruling class emerged, deeply invested in the status quo and sharing financial interests with Union Minière and the Belgian state.¹ The European interests found their perfect representative in Moïse Tshombe: Christian, anti-communist, educated in an American missionary school who sometimes engaged in business pursuits himself. Belgium certainly celebrated when Tshombe declared Katanga independent on July 11, 1960, while the Congo was dealing with the mutiny of the Force Publique.² Katanga had been independent before Leopold's land grab, with its store of precious metals serving as a major point of conflict between Lunda and Baluba tribes.³ The Europeans living in Katanga had openly discussed secession even before independence, and there had been some consideration of an offer to join the province to neighboring Rhodesia, another state dominated by minority whites.

The Congo was the leading supplier of cobalt and industrial diamonds (used for mining or construction rather than jewelry) to the West, and also contributed meaningful amounts of copper and tin. The industrial diamond production was primarily located in Kasai, but the remaining mining interests lay in Katanga and across the border in northern Rhodesia. Furthermore, Katanga produced a great deal of cobalt and tantalum, minerals that had defense implications and were not present in significant quantities in the U.S., meaning that the access to Katangese sources was critical.⁴ Significantly, the United States had loaned \$60 million to nearby Rhodesia during the 1950s, with some of that investment going directly to the Rhodesian-Congo Power Corporation. The loans were expected to be repaid through the delivery of cobalt and copper to the U.S. Thus,

¹ Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 91

² Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 7

³ Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 89

⁴ Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo*, 29

stability in Katanga, and in neighboring and economically-linked Rhodesia, was demonstrably a factor in American interest in the region.

That said, the economic interests, while present, should not be overstated. Less than 3% of U.S. copper imports came from Katanga, and only around one-fourth of America's copper needs were imported at all.⁵ Katangese and Rhodesian copper mines were actually more important to U.S. allies in Western Europe, which suggests only an indirect economic interest for the United States, but helps to explain the actions of Belgium and the U.K. in supporting the independent regime in Katanga. This consideration helps explain the continued interest of Eisenhower and Kennedy, as both were reluctant to cause problems with America's Cold War allies in Europe. Yet it comes as no surprise that American direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa was a tiny portion of all foreign direct investment, and almost all of that went to white-ruled regimes in South Africa, Rhodesia and Angola. American direct investment in the Congo in 1960 totaled less than \$20 million, hardly a substantial figure.⁶

Even though Katanga was not essential to American interests, the substantial yield of its mines called into question the economic viability of the Republic of the Congo without it. Lumumba and Kasavubu planned to land in Elisabethville, capital of Katanga, on July 12 to discuss the situation with Moise Tshombe, the provincial president and leader of independent Katanga. As they approached the runway, a combined force of Katangese and Belgian troops denied them permission to land. Katanga's economic interests were tied closely with those of Belgium, and Tshombe had demonstrated a willingness to allow the Europeans to maintain a presence in Katanga. Even before

⁵ Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo*, 29

⁶ Weissman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo*, 31

declaring independence, he had requested the assistance of Belgian paratroopers in restoring order in Elisabethville. Lumumba responded by demanding that all Belgian military be withdrawn from the Congo immediately and turning to the United Nations for help.

The secession of Katanga had broad implications for the nascent Congolese state. Under Secretary of State C. Douglas Dillon told the National Security Council that “if the Congo was to be a viable state, it would need the resources of Katanga.”⁷ But in addition to depriving the nation of more than half its revenue, the secession served to encourage separatism in neighboring South Kasai, which had its own mineral wealth in the form of industrial diamonds. Tshombe, a member of the Lunda tribe, was quick to recognize the independent regime of Albert Kalonji, in an effort to curry favor with the Balubas, spread across South Kasai and northern Katanga. However, the Baluba feared domination by the Lunda, and armed resistance to Tshombe’s government swelled up throughout northern Katanga. Tshombe responded by releasing mercenary troops in retaliation, as both sides committed terrible atrocities, before the U.N. intervened to save the Baluba from extermination.⁸

Lumumba, meanwhile, found the Katangese secession to be totally unacceptable; he declared that it “tore the heart out of Congolese nationhood.”⁹ After July 11, Lumumba and Kasavubu did not authorize the use of Belgian soldiers to restore order, but this did not prevent the Europeans from intervening all over the country, sometimes in response to appeals for support from Tshombe. The element that Lumumba found particularly outrageous was the length of delays in response from U.S. or U.N., a

⁷ Memo of National Security Council Meeting, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:423

⁸ Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 92-93

⁹ Qtd. in Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa*, 94

reminder of the low priority that Eisenhower placed on Africa as well as of Lumumba's impetuosity. It was Lumumba's unwavering devotion to reuniting the Congo and expelling Belgian troops that precipitated the American-Soviet clash in the Congo.

At the same time that Lumumba was in Washington meeting with Secretary of State Christian Herter and Deputy Secretary of State Max Dillon, the meeting that inspired the Eisenhower Administration to consider replacing him, Dag Hammarskjold was in Brussels negotiating for the removal of Belgian troops. Hammarskjold made some progress before leaving for his next stop in Leopoldville. The Secretary-General spent the last few days of July meeting with the Council of Ministers, led by Deputy Premier Antoine Gizenga during Lumumba's absence. Hammarskjold hoped to make it clear that the U.N. did not recognize Katanga's independence, but that the U.N. did not want to involve itself until it could come to some kind of agreement with Belgian and Katangese officials. Gizenga followed in the footsteps of his mentor Lumumba by making an embarrassing speech at a dinner in Hammarskjold's honor, implying that the United Nations was only looking out for Belgian interests.¹⁰

The impatience demonstrated by Gizenga and the Council of Ministers was reflected in Lumumba's actions in New York, sending an aggressive letter to the Security Council President pushing for faster resolution in Katanga and meeting with the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Vasily Kuznetsov. The Soviets responded dramatically to Lumumba's advances, appointing their first Ambassador to Leopoldville, and threatening exactly the kind of involvement that the U.S. and the U.N. feared. Moscow promised significant economic assistance for the Congo, complete with Soviet technicians, all on a bilateral basis outside the U.N. More alarming was the August 1 statement that "In the

¹⁰ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 40

event of the aggression against the Congo continuing...the Soviet government will not hesitate to take resolute measures to rebuff the aggressors who...are in fact acting with the encouragement of all the colonialist powers of NATO.”¹¹

This comment, along with Gizenga’s uncooperativeness, led Hammarskjold to make a panicked request for American assistance, hoping that the U.S. would be able to prevail upon Brussels to remove their troops in short order. The Secretary-General worried that if Belgium did not announce such an intention, the return of Lumumba from America might herald the outbreak of civil war, giving the Soviets a reason to intervene militarily. At this point in the process, the U.S. thought it unlikely the U.S.S.R. would involve itself in what was still seen as a backwater tribal scuffle. Herter and the rest of Eisenhower’s State Department had advised Hammarskjold to tread carefully in his dealings with Belgium, afraid to alienate a NATO ally. However, Herter was willing to go along with Hammarskjold to a degree, sending a message to the U.S. Ambassador in Brussels that “Belgium must be prepared accept such withdrawal as fact of life.” Herter offers the rationale that the “U.S. assumes Belgian long-term interest in Congo is to restore and maintain Belgian economic presence there and deny it to Communists. If this correct, believes troop and base issues must be subordinated economic issue.” He goes on to soften his instructions, saying that the Americans would use their influence with Hammarskjold to return many Belgians to the Congo as soon as possible: “U.S. would point out complexity Congo situation, stating that only long Belgian experience in Congo can hope restore economic and technical situation in short term.”¹² Thus, Herter took a

¹¹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 41

¹² Telegram from Herter to Burden, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:382

gentle and realistic tack with the Belgians, hoping to achieve the desired result of getting Belgians out of the Congo without alienating their government.

On August 2, the same day that Herter sent that telegram to Brussels, Hammarskjold announced that the U.N. force would be allowed to enter Katanga a few days later, on August 6. Yet almost immediately, these plans had to be postponed, as Tshombe told the Secretary-General's special representative Ralph Bunche that regardless of what the Belgian government had agreed, he planned to stop U.N. intervention using force. Bunche agreed with Hammarskjold that the likelihood of violence was now so high that the U.N. would require a stronger Security Council mandate. Hammarskjold hoped that body would pass a resolution, definitively stating that Katanga was part of the Republic of the Congo, and that the Security Council's previous resolutions should be applied to even the secessionist provinces, of which there were now two.¹³ On August 8, Katanga had been joined by South Kasai, declared independent under the presidency of Lumumba's old rival, Albert Kalonji. The secession of South Kasai provided a buffer zone between troops of the central government in Leopoldville and their goal in Katanga.

Hammarskjold's actions had the unfortunate effect of upsetting almost everyone. Lumumba and the Soviets were apoplectic about this further delay, saying that Tshombe did not pose a credible military threat and that the U.N. had fallen victim to a ridiculous bluff. At the same time, the Belgian Ambassador to the United States told Herter that "the Belgians feel they have been abused and Hammarskjold had not acted properly...the effect of Hammarskjold's action had been extremely bad on the 23,000 whites who lived

¹³ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 42-43

in the Katanga and who held its economy together.”¹⁴ They were particularly disappointed with Hammarskjold’s rush to enter Katanga, as it “did not provide any time for meaningful negotiations between Mr. Bunche and the Katanga authorities.”¹⁵ The Belgian government felt that Hammarskjold had disregarded its wishes and acceded to a plan that would placate Lumumba, an understanding that would not be borne out by Lumumba’s stated response. The United Nations was in the difficult position of resolving a conflict between two states with a long history of antagonism and diametrically opposed agendas, each of whom was important to the organization in different ways; Hammarskjold could not afford to lose face in Africa or in Western Europe.

The United States faced a similar dilemma, a not uncommon problem in international politics when the Cold War ran up against decolonization. However, the Eisenhower Administration decided decisively that its interests were primarily aligned with those of Europe. William Burden, the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, wrote a letter to Secretary of State Herter to remind him of what was most important. While recognizing the difficult position that Herter was in, Burden said, “I think the pendulum has now swung too much in the Congo direction and we must give full consideration to the very serious damage which our actions are causing to Belgo-American relations and to NATO as a whole.” It was an emerging dilemma in the Cold War foreign policy of the United States, as Burden realized: “I am sure that continued problems of this nature will arise because of the inevitable dichotomy of trying to do as much as possible in Africa

¹⁴ Memo of Conversation between Herter and Louis Scheyven, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:387

¹⁵ Memo of Conversation between Herter and Louis Scheyven, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:387

without too much damage in Europe.”¹⁶ This kind of calculation would be taken up, albeit reluctantly, by Kennedy when he came to office.

Lumumba was unwilling to accept the argument made by representatives of the U.N. and the U.S. that the situation in Katanga could only be resolved slowly, with careful negotiations. For Lumumba, the matter was clear: Katanga was a province of the Republic of the Congo, and its secession was illegal. When the U.N. and the U.S. brushed off his concerns, he elected to turn quickly to the other alternative, the Soviet Union. Lumumba recognized the danger to the Congolese state and acted in a way that he thought might minimize that danger. Without Katangese mining, the nation would be impoverished and insignificant. Lumumba also felt that a strong centralized government was necessary to unite the huge country, with its numerous tribal and linguistic divisions; the examples of Katanga and then South Kasai opened the possibility for further fragmentation. Lumumba also decided that he had no choice but to stand up to the Belgian business interests that he identified as being behind the Katanga secession in the first place. If he did not assert his right as elected Prime Minister to determine the future for all of the Congo, his rule would never be valid and the nation would remain at the mercy of wealthy Europeans. The tragedy of Patrice Lumumba’s fall is that he was correct on all counts; the U.N. and the U.S. should have recognized that Lumumba’s erratic behavior was partially a response to a legitimate crisis of existence for the nation that he had just been chosen to lead. However, the U.N. and the U.S. had their own interests to protect, and neither was willing to alienate Belgium or accelerate their plans.

The Secretary-General entered Elisabethville on August 12, bringing only 240 Swedish soldiers in the famous blue U.N. helmets, a force which Tshombe referred to

¹⁶ Letter from Burden to Herter, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:384

only as Hammarskjold's bodyguard.¹⁷ On August 14, the Belgians formally turned power over to the new U.N. force, with troops from neutral African countries joining the Swedes in Katanga in a matter of days. Hammarskjold felt that bringing the U.N. force to Elisabethville without bloodshed had been a tremendous achievement, but Lumumba did not feel the same way. Lumumba had wanted to accompany Hammarskjold to Elisabethville and to use U.N. planes to bring his own troops in to crush the insurrection. Instead, Hammarskjold had chosen to sidestep Lumumba and confer directly with Tshombe, seeming to grant legitimacy to an independent Katanga.

Lumumba wrote the Secretary-General a series of angry letters, accusing the U.N. of "acting as though my government...did not exist" and declaring ostentatiously that "the government and people of the Congo have lost their confidence in the Secretary-General."¹⁸ Lumumba was also extremely critical of the U.N. for using only Swedish troops at the outset. "How can you imagine, just like that, a hat painted blue is enough to eliminate the complexes of conservative officers from Sweden or Canada or Great Britain?" he asked a journalist. It was clear to Lumumba that the U.N. soldiers would take the Belgian side, since they shared "the same past, the same history, the same taste for our riches."¹⁹ At a meeting of the National Security Council, the view was advanced that the letters may have been written as part of a communist conspiracy: "Hammarskjold believes that they were written by a Belgian Communist who is Lumumba's chief of cabinet. Others, however, think that a Soviet attaché in the Congo, who has had extensive UN experience, may have been the author."²⁰ The U.S. Embassy in Brussels

¹⁷ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 48

¹⁸ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 48

¹⁹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 49-50

²⁰ Memo of National Security Meeting, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:422

also warned the State Department about the imminent arrival of two top officials in the Belgian Communist Party, saying that their efforts might result in a “substantial increase in effectiveness and coordination communist influence in Congo government.” The Embassy feared that these imports might take over key governmental responsibilities from its “present collection of fly-by-nights, carpet baggers, embittered ex-civil servants and African communists.”²¹

Lumumba’s more-or-less open break with the U.N. and Hammarskjold highlighted his increasingly isolated position even among the independent African states. Almost all African leaders, including his role model, Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, encouraged Lumumba to work within the U.N. framework. Nikita Khrushchev, perhaps worried that an increasingly marginalized Lumumba would be replaced by someone less sympathetic to the Soviet cause, opted to increase his involvement. Although the Soviets had been flouting the U.N. restrictions on bilateral aid from the beginning, by the end of August, Khrushchev was ready to increase Soviet assistance beyond food and trucks, to include weapons, ammunition and technicians to support Lumumba’s army.²²

With the knowledge that this aid was forthcoming, Lumumba acted boldly to sever his relationship with the U.N. and “settle the Katanga problem with our own forces.”²³ On August 24, Lumumba demanded that the United Nations turn over control and security at the Leopoldville airport to his troops, threatening the use of force if the U.N. would not comply. Bunche tried to arrange a meeting with Lumumba to remind the Prime Minister that the U.N. had only been maintaining order since the violent attack on Canadian U.N. personnel a week prior, but Lumumba refused to meet with him. This

²¹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 61

²² Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 58

²³ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 63

proved to be the last straw for Bunche, who declared “I’m a patient man, but my patience has worn thin.”²⁴ He returned to New York to brief his ill-fated successor Rajeshwar Dayal.

On the same day, Lumumba seized planes from Air Congo to send soldiers to Kasai, as part of a force intended to defeat Kalonji’s secession and then move on to Katanga. On this account, the Prime Minister again displayed his trademark impetuosity, preempting Gizenga’s plan to act a week later. Gizenga had publicly announced a target date at the end of August, since Belgian troops were expected to be removed by then. Lumumba even confirmed American fears by responding to a journalist’s question that the Congo had long “enjoyed the moral support of the Soviet Union... Today we are receiving not only moral but also material support.”²⁵

The next day, August 25, a collection of Africa’s foreign ministers arrived in Leopoldville for a conference whose purpose was to encourage Lumumba to back away from his aggressive stance. The conference turned even more negative after the Prime Minister invited his guests to join him on a visit to his base of power in Stanleyville. There, the ministers witnessed Lumumba’s review of the eight hundred troops he intended to send to Katanga as well as the aftermath of an unprovoked beating, by members of the Congolese army and police force, of ten U.N. airmen from the U.S. and Canada. Although Lumumba’s campaign in Kasai had an auspicious beginning, taking Kalonji’s capital at Bakwanga and threatening the Katangese border under the command of Czechoslovakian advisers, it quickly fell apart. When the Soviet planes showed up to transport reinforcements to Bakwanga on September 5, they were too late to stop the

²⁴ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 62

²⁵ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 63

military action from turning into a wholesale slaughter of the region's Baluba population.²⁶

The Soviets sent hundred of trucks, first to the Atlantic port of Matadi and then overland to Luluabourg, the starting point for Lumumba's campaign in South Kasai. They also provided ten Ilyushin IL-14 airplanes with crews of eight, including some Soviet technicians.²⁷ These considerations were crucial for the invasion of South Kasai; Lumumba almost certainly would not have been able to transport his troops through the thick jungles without them. The Soviet Union dispensed the aid directly, in flagrant disregard of the clear requirement for all foreign aid to be administered through the U.N. However, it is clear that this was not a particularly meaningful aid package, especially in Cold War terms. Khrushchev realized that the Soviet Union was not capable of providing significant military might to a nation that distance from Russia. Flights had to choose from two routes across Africa, one across the Sahara through Rabat and Accra and ending in Leopoldville, and another from Cairo to Khartoum to Stanleyville. Neither was desirable nor feasible on a regular basis.²⁸

Ultimately, Khrushchev opted for very limited Soviet aid, on the grounds that it might improve Lumumba's situation without being likely to provoke military intervention by Western powers that had already shown their commitment to a U.N.-led solution. Khrushchev was correct to doubt U.S. or European military intervention, but he did not realize the alarm that his actions would cause. The Eisenhower Administration regarded Lumumba's turn to the Soviets as an ominous one and began devoting a great deal more attention to addressing the Congo Crisis, possibly through assassinating

²⁶ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 70

²⁷ Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 110

²⁸ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 57

Lumumba. This turned out to be unnecessary because Lumumba's use of Soviet planes on September 5 prompted the slow-moving President Kasavubu to oust Lumumba as Prime Minister that night.

The limited nature of Soviet intervention did not prevent the Eisenhower Administration from regarding it as a first-class threat. In a National Security Council meeting during the Congo's tumultuous August, Maurice Stans, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, offered a racially-charged explanation for the Congo Crisis. "Mr. Stans said that it was the consensus of people who know the Congo that it was the objective of Lumumba to drive the whites out and to take over their property; that Lumumba had no concept of the implications of such action for his country."²⁹ Allen Dulles added his suspicions that Lumumba was on the Soviet payroll, evidently considered it his responsibility to do so in each meeting of the NSC. The CIA's man in Leopoldville, Lawrence Devlin, remarked that "we were convinced that we were observing the beginning of a major Soviet effort to gain control of a key country in central Africa for use as a springboard to control much of the continent."³⁰

The Board of National Estimates made a more thoughtful and realistic forecast of Lumumba's future actions.

Lumumba's foreign policy would probably be opportunistic and quixotic. His probable dependence for support and advice on the Bloc and on such African countries as Ghana and Guinea, coupled with his underlying anti-Belgian, anti-white feelings, would make him a left neutralist, but he would probably be hard to keep pinned down...His wild behavior would probably irritate the older line neutralists and pro-Western governments [in Africa].³¹

²⁹ Memo of National Security Council Meeting, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:423

³⁰ Qtd. in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War*, 111

³¹ Memo from Board of National Estimates to Dulles, FRUS, 1958-1960, 14:439

The events of August 1960 impressed on many parties the unreliability of Lumumba's rule. His bullheaded devotion to the Katanga issue not only catalyzed international opposition to him, it also did much to alienate the popular Prime Minister from other Congolese leaders, like Tshombe, Kasavubu and Mobutu, all of whom would be complicit in his murder only a few months later. The United States embarked on its mission to assassinate Lumumba during this period, and Kasavubu would dismiss him from office soon thereafter. Ironically, the tumult caused by so many groups striving to unseat Lumumba led to a dramatic decline in the attention being paid to Katanga. Tshombe's independent government in Elisabethville would continue more or less unmolested for the next year, until the election of Cyrille Adoula allowed the U.S. and the U.N. to return their focus to the province that caused so much trouble in the opening months of the Congo Crisis.

Indeed, one of Adoula's first acts as Prime Minister was to pass Ordinance No. 70 on August 24, requiring that "all the non-Congolese officers and mercenaries serving in the Katanga Forces...are expelled from the territory of the Republic of the Congo."³² At Hammarskjold's request, Adoula also sent a letter asking for "the assistance of the United Nations in putting an end to the aggressive activities of the Katanga Gendarmerie and in securing the evacuation of foreign officers and mercenaries serving in the armed forces of Katanga."³³ Adoula's requests seemed reasonable in comparison to Lumumba's wild-eyed demands, and the election of a new and more conciliatory Belgian government committed to repatriate the remaining Belgians. Accounts placed the number of foreign military officers in Katanga at about five hundred in August 1960, including two hundred

³² Qtd. in Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events*, 46

³³ Qtd. in Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events*, 45

Belgians, soon to be returned home, and three hundred non-Belgians, whose presence Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak would not address.³⁴ These other white mercenaries had been recruited from South Africa, Rhodesia or Algeria, and were feared for their violence and uncivilized appearance, which gave them the nickname *les affreux*, or the dreadful ones.

Hammarhjold and Conor Cruise O'Brien, the U.N.'s representative in Katanga, agreed that Tshombe would resist rejoining the Republic of the Congo as long as these well-armed mercenaries remained at his disposal. Thus, on August 28, O'Brien led a peaceful operation, with the codename Rumpunch, which captured more than eighty foreign mercenaries in a few hours. O'Brien temporarily detained the rabble-rousing Interior Minister Godefroid Munongo and seized the radio station and post office to prevent warnings or organized action. The United Nations considered Rumpunch to be a decisive success, with Hammarhjold telling O'Brien that it had been an "exceedingly sensitive operation carried through with skill and courage."³⁵ The arrests only ended when Tshombe announced that he "bowed before the decisions of the U.N." and the Belgian consul in Elisabethville agreed to take responsibility for repatriating the remaining foreigners.³⁶

The United States had serious concerns about the effects of Operation Rumpunch, and especially about the possible precedent for future operations of the same kind. McMurtrie Godley, the de facto U.S. Ambassador in Leopoldville, expressed his reservations to Sture Linner, who was in charge of the U.N. Operation in the Congo: "I

³⁴ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 289

³⁵ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 290

³⁶ Qtd. in Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events*, 15

pointed out he had taken major risk re security Europeans.”³⁷ Linner confidently dismissed this point, which only worried Godley more. He reported to the State Department that he was “considerably concerned” about the “extended arrests and deportation Belgian advisers which could mount to some 100 or 150 key men in all branches of government who currently assuring some semblance of governmental administration. Action might also extend to technicians who keep public works, communications, transport operating.”³⁸

Secretary of State Dean Rusk responded with an unsurprising take on American interests in the Congo.

While we approve removal of Belgian military personnel Katanga at earliest possible date and believe this action will reduce Tshombe ability remain in secession we believe current situation requires great care and careful assessment subsequent UN steps if eventual political reconciliation is not to be jeopardized... We believe that Tshombe could provide conservative counterweight needed in Adoula government, and we hope UN will use new position of strength to induce Tshombe's cooperation with central government and not to destroy him.³⁹

Just days after securing the ascension of Adoula to the Premiership, Kennedy’s State Department was undermining his most important goal because it feared the possibility of a leftist majority in Leopoldville. British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was even more explicit in his memoirs, “We wanted a united Congo, but not a Communist Congo.”⁴⁰ Once again, the United States showed itself to be willing to accept undesirable candidates for leadership positions based primarily on their anti-Communist credentials.

Although the actions of the consular corps in Elisabethville calmed things down at first, the failure to round up all the foreigners meant tensions were not relaxed for long.

³⁷ Telegram from Godley to State Department, FRUS, 1961-63, 20:199

³⁸ Telegram from Godley to State Department, FRUS, 1961-63, 20:200

³⁹ Telegram from Rusk to Godley, FRUS, 1961-63, 20:201

⁴⁰ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 290

On September 8, the U.N. found that 104 foreigners were missing and unaccounted for, presumably laying low among the European civilian population.⁴¹ On September 9, the Congolese Parliament met in a secret session to approve a wide range of measures intended to put an end to the Katangese secession. These included the suspension of the Katangese provincial assembly, the expulsion of all foreign military advisers, the occupation of various government buildings, and the confiscation of all military equipment. The resolution passed in secret also had the effect of declaring a state of exception in Katanga province, and issuing warrants for the arrest of five Katangese leaders, including Tshombe and Munongo. These actions, including the arrests, would be undertaken by the U.N. troops in Katanga, although the plan called for O'Brien to use the threat of arrest to convince Tshombe to negotiate an end to the secession, with the warrant only being exercised if he refused.⁴²

The operation, codenamed Morthor, would take place a few days later, on September 13. In the few days between the resolution and its execution, the situation would deteriorate even more. The belligerent Munongo apparently acted on his own authority to use the secret police, the Sureté, to arrest Michel Tombelaine, the deputy U.N. representative in Elisabethville. Although Tombelaine was quickly released, O'Brien's demand that Tshombe dismiss Munongo was refused. By September 12, Tshombe had disregarded two other U.N. requests, that he meet with representatives of the Leopoldville government and then with Hammarskjöld, who would arrive in the Congo on September 13. O'Brien's patience with Tshombe had run out, and he

⁴¹ Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events*, 16

⁴² Telegram from Gullion to State Department, FRUS, 1961-63, 20:207

announced to the press that “this was the last time he would ask [Tshombe] to meet with the Leopoldville leaders.”⁴³

Hammar skjold and O’Brien saw Operation Morthor as the last step in ending the Katanga secession and thus, the Congo Crisis. Unfortunately, it turned out to be something of a disaster, especially when compared to the efficient, decisive and bloodless Operation Rumpunch. Members of the Katangese delegation in Leopoldville had warned Tshombe about the resolution, an easily-foreseeable outcome that crucially undermined the element of surprise that had made the difference in Rumpunch.⁴⁴ Tshombe, after expressing a willingness to cooperate with O’Brien on the telephone, disappeared from his residence and fled to Rhodesia. O’Brien called the failure to secure Tshombe’s residence the “fatal flaw” of Operation Morthor.⁴⁵ Without Tshombe’s presence on the radio to discourage resistance, fierce fighting broke out between the U.N. troops and mercenaries. O’Brien had planned the operation for the early morning of September 13 so that it would be finished by the time Hammar skjold landed, but the fighting meant that the Secretary-General had to move on to Elisabethville almost immediately after landing in Leopoldville.

The U.S. and the U.K., displeased with a much easier and more successful U.N. operation in Rumpunch, found themselves in a very difficult situation as fighting broke out between the U.N. and the various Europeans and Katangese in Elisabethville. William Canup, the U.S. Consul in Elisabethville, identified the conflict by explaining that the “situation places members of Consulate completely on side of UN despite our

⁴³ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 291

⁴⁴ Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events*, 16

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 292

willingness to recognize that UN has committed inexcusable blunders.”⁴⁶ Ralph Bunche told Hammarskjold that the Americans were upset that Hammarskjold had not consulted with them, even though they were the primary financial backers of the U.N. Operation in the Congo. Ultimately, the U.S. and U.K. did not want to see an expanded role for the U.N. in Katanga, particularly a military one. Ambivalent about Tshombe in the first place, they were openly hostile to the notion of putting U.N. troops in danger to force his surrender. Trying to address the U.N.’s aerial inferiority (Katanga had a single fighter plane, and thus one more than the U.N.), Hammarskjold asked for help from nearby Ethiopia, but the British refused permission for the Ethiopian planes to fly over Uganda on the way.⁴⁷

In an unenviable situation, Hammarskjold agreed to travel to Rhodesia to discuss a cease-fire with Tshombe in person, an action attributed by some of his aids to a private ultimatum that threatened the end of British support for the U.N. Operation in the Congo. On the night of September 17, the Secretary-General’s plane checked in with airport officials in the Rhodesian city of Ndola to announce its descent as expected, but then radio communication ceased unexpectedly. After some waiting, the officials on the ground surmised that Hammarskjold had changed his plans abruptly and went home. It was not until the next morning that the wreckage of the Secretary-General’s plane was found a few miles from its destination; one security guard was alive to tell the story but he died a few days later.⁴⁸

The U.N. would not rule out the possibility of attack or sabotage, and an investigation concluded in 1962 made the same conclusion, although it found no

⁴⁶ Telegram from Canup to State Department, FRUS, 1961-63, 20:213

⁴⁷ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 295

⁴⁸ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 298

evidence for such an outcome. On this premise, the Soviets suggested that Tshombe might be responsible, but O'Brien said that this was unlikely. He blamed the troublesome Munongo, possibly in conjunction with European mercenaries in Katanga. Cyrille Adoula felt that Hammarskjold was "the victim of certain financial circles for whom a human life is worth less than a gram of copper and uranium."⁴⁹ Ironically, the plane crash may have been the result of the pilot taking an unfamiliar and circuitous route to avoid interference by the single Katangese jet plane that had been causing so many problems.

Hammarskjold was quickly replaced by the Burmese diplomat U Thant, whom Hammarskjold himself had mentioned as a possible successor. Thant had also been listed among the possible U.N. envoys to the Congo after the debacle with Rajeshwar Dayal. Yet Thant did not have the same personal investment in African decolonization that Hammarskjold had shown, and was willing to leave Congo policy to his deputy Ralph Bunche. Bunche had remained deeply involved in the events in the Congo even after he left Leopoldville, and the Americans were very satisfied to see him take an even more prominent role under Thant.⁵⁰

Tshombe continued his intended cease-fire negotiations with other U.N. officials after Hammarskjold died. On September 20, the U.N. and Tshombe reached a deal that would end the fighting and leave Tshombe in clear control of Katanga. In Leopoldville, Adoula made it clear that the cease-fire did not apply to his forces, a position which met with support from the Soviet Union, which had decried the cease-fire as a form of surrender to Tshombe. The British, meanwhile, were glad that a cease-fire had been reached, seeing it as a validation of their blocking the arrival of Ethiopian fighter planes.

⁴⁹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 298

⁵⁰ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 300-1

A British official remarked to the press “If it is imperialist to try to halt fighting before it gets out of hand, then we’re imperialist.”⁵¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the reaction of the United States was more ambivalent. After Hammarskjold’s death, the Kennedy Administration had been anxious to bolster the legitimacy of the U.N. and so demonstrated a new willingness to support its military actions in the Congo. The U.S. reversed course on its previous policy and allowed American planes to be used to carry United Nations soldiers within the Congo for the first time. Hammarskjold had requested this capability before his death, but the United States was only willing to acquiesce on the evening of September 18, in the hope that the use of the planes would “enhance chances achievement early cease fire under conditions favorable to UN achievement its basic objectives in Congo.”⁵² The next day, Kennedy approved a contingent offer of eight U.S. fighter jets to support and defend U.N. transport planes, but not to intentionally seek out and engage enemy aircraft. In the end, the cease-fire and the arrival of airplanes from other U.N. nations meant that the American contribution was not needed.

Nevertheless, Kennedy’s action was a major shift from the previous discouragement of any active involvement, and it is telling that it happened in response to a change in the U.N. structure and not a change in the ground situation in Katanga. If anything, Kennedy’s newfound resolve reflected his desire to end the fighting in Katanga as soon as possible. Although this was a shift in American objectives, it is consistent with Eisenhower’s earlier realization that the Katanga secession represented a untenable situation for the Congo. This attitude informed American readings of Tshombe’s actions

⁵¹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 303

⁵² Telegram from Bowles to Gullion, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:227

after the cease-fire, leading to the conclusion that Tshombe would respond only to force. George Ball, the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, wrote to Kennedy about this predicament: "So long as he feels in control of the military situation in the Katanga, and so long as he remains under the effective direction of his Belgian backers and advisers, Tshombe will be unwilling to negotiate for anything but the partition of the Congo." Ball proposed an obvious but radical solution, "We must immediately build up UN fighting power to the point where Tshombe will realize he cannot win."⁵³ The United States found itself in the surprising position of opposing Great Britain on the aggressiveness of the U.N.'s Congo policy, a far cry from the cooperation between the two countries in recent months.

At the same time, Adoula was dealing with the continued intransigence of Gizenga, who had left Leopoldville on October 4 and did not return a week later as agreed. In an effort to undermine the opposition in Stanleyville, Adoula prevailed on Gizenga's military commander, General Victor Lundula, to swear his loyalty to Adoula's government. Then Lundula joined Mobutu to lead an offensive against Katanga starting on November 2.⁵⁴ The same day, the Belgian government announced that it would no longer consider as valid the passports of its citizens serving in the Katangese military police; Tshombe responded by claiming that his armed forces no longer contained any mercenaries.⁵⁵ The U.N. was spurred to act even more forcefully in the Congo, given that troops from Stanleyville had mutinied and surrounded the U.N. soldiers in the town of Kindu, arresting, beating and killing Italian airmen over the course of several days in mid-November. It was in this environment that the Security Council approved a

⁵³ Memo from Ball to Kennedy, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:235

⁵⁴ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 306

⁵⁵ Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events*, 19

resolution on November 24 that authorized the use of force to end the secession in Katanga and expel foreign missionaries. The next day, Tshombe made a speech that encouraged the people of Katanga to resist the Security Council resolution and kill soldiers of the United Nations, using poisoned arrows if they did not have access to modern weapons.⁵⁶

The battle-lines had clearly been drawn, so that on the night of November 28, Katangese commandoes attacked a dinner party being held in honor of U.S. Senator Thomas Dodd, a great supporter of Tshombe. The men kidnapped and beat Brian Urquhart and George Ivan Smith, the U.N.'s top civilian officials in Katanga now that O'Brien had gone back to New York. Smith was rescued shortly thereafter, but Urquhart spent the night in a military camp and was only released when a local U.N. commander threatened to destroy the presidential palace. When the Katangese troops refused to remove barricades on the road leading to the airport in Elisabethville, even with repeated warnings and ultimatums, the U.N. forcibly removed it on December 5, sparking violence all over the city.⁵⁷

This time, the United States was eager to help, using six American planes to transport U.N. troops and anti-aircraft guns to Leopoldville, with the plan to devote twenty-one more transport planes to bringing additional U.N. troops to the Congo from their home countries. By this point, the United Nations had its own air force of fifteen combat planes, which it used to support the U.S. transportation efforts and to bomb Elisabethville and other areas. The air strikes were strongly protested by Belgium and

⁵⁶ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 311

⁵⁷ Hoskyns, *The Congo: A Chronology of Events*, 21

especially by Union Minière, which feared the destruction of its mining infrastructure.⁵⁸ The British were pushed into support for this operation not only because of their desire for continued good relations with the Americans, but also because Conor Cruise O'Brien had resigned from the U.N. and publicly identified the U.K. for undermining previous operations in September. Kennedy worked to reassure British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, while Macmillan hoped to cement his reputation against O'Brien's charges by giving bombs to the United Nations.

Tshombe sent a telegram to Kennedy on December 14, asking Kennedy to “designate a suitable negotiator and to stop at once useless bloodshed.”⁵⁹ As a result, Kennedy dispatched Gullion to Ndola on December 18, where the American Ambassador prevailed upon Tshombe to travel to Kitona to meet with Adoula. The Kitona agreement saw Tshombe accept virtually all of Leopoldville's conditions: Tshombe recognized the central government under Kasavubu as controlling a unified Congolese nation, agreed to send deputies and senators to the national Parliament, and would place his military forces at the disposal of Kasavubu.⁶⁰ George Ball sent a telegram to Kennedy calling it the “most encouraging event” in the Congo for months and noting that “Such a complete capitulation on Tshombe's part goes far beyond our expectations.”⁶¹

Over the next few weeks, the United States would see even more encouraging signs. Mobutu's troops ended the secession of South Kasai on December 30, 1961, arresting Kalonji after an extended military campaign. In January 1962, the Congolese army defeated the forces in Stanleyville and arrested Gizenga. Although Tshombe was

⁵⁸ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 314

⁵⁹ Telegram from Ball to Gullion, FRUS, 1961-1963, 20:316, Note 1

⁶⁰ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 321

⁶¹ Qtd. in Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 321

unsurprisingly reneging on his commitments at Kitona, the two figures who owed their rises most to the United States, Cyrille Adoula and Joseph Mobutu, had managed to defeat the major enemies that had undermined the central government in Leopoldville. In the short term, at least, American intervention was justified. G. Mennen Williams reported in 1963 that “U.S. Congo policy has won us high esteem in all Africa except for European minorities in Portuguese Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and Republic of South Africa.”⁶² It is clear, however, that Kennedy was no more anxious than Eisenhower had been to play a major ongoing role in the continent.

⁶² Memo from Williams to Rusk, FRUS, 1961-1963, 21:328

Conclusion

Events in the Congo turned out to be far less settled over the next few years than they had appeared in January 1962. Tshombe's negotiations with the Leopoldville government were ultimately unsuccessful in bringing Katanga back into the fold. It was not until almost a year later, in December 1962, that another major U.N. military mission, Operation Grand Slam, was able to secure the end of the Katanga secession. Unbelievably, Kasavubu named Tshombe to replace Adoula as Prime Minister in July 1964, giving him a mandate to end a new rebellion, this one in the Congo's Orientale and Kivu Provinces. The rebels, who called themselves Simba, after the Swahili word for lion, executed more than 20,000 Congolese and took over 1,600 foreign hostages. In response, U.S. planes were used to drop hundreds of Belgian paratroopers into Stanleyville in November 1964, where they rescued most of the hostages but left the country almost immediately. Mobutu's soldiers moved into Stanleyville and executed more than two thousand Congolese suspected of participating in the rebellion.¹

All of the continuing violence in the Congo over this period was merely prologue for Mobutu's overthrow of Kasavubu in 1965, with the support of the United States through the CIA. In an effort to distance himself from his pro-American past and establish his credentials as a leader of Africans, he changed the names of the major cities

¹ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 378-9

and of the country itself, which was called Zaire while he remained in power. Thus, Joseph Mobutu took the name Mobutu Sese Seko and made it a crime to give a child a European name.¹ He banned opposition political parties and nationalized Union Minière, which greatly upset the Belgians, while his expulsion of foreign businessmen contributed to serious problems with Zaire's economy. Despite these radical moves, Mobutu's staunch anti-Communism meant that he enjoyed a great deal of support in the U.S. under the Administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon, with the United States even prevailing on Mobutu to send Zairian troops to counter the Cuban soldiers in Angola, although this would turn out to be an embarrassing defeat for Mobutu. It was only during the Presidency of Jimmy Carter, and the growing focus on human rights in his Administration, that Washington began to really distance itself from his regime, inspiring Mobutu to introduce some cosmetic reforms.²

Mobutu would eventually be overthrown in 1997 when rebel leader Laurent Kabila led an army of mostly ethnic Tutsis to seize the capital at Kinshasa (formerly Leopoldville). Mobutu was suffering from prostate cancer and unable to organize an effective resistance, fleeing the country to spend his remaining months in exile. Kabila abandoned Mobutu's nomenclature and changed the name of the country to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mobutu is remembered today as an authoritarian and a kleptocrat, having embezzled millions of dollars from the country during his decades-long rule. American support for him is a black mark on U.S. foreign policy among the African community, especially when paired with America's willingness to kill the popular Lumumba. Yet it is not clear how much blame can be placed on the U.S.; the

¹ Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 380

² Kalb, *The Congo Cables*, 385

Congo crisis began well before America had even taken notice of the new nation, and violence continued after the American-backed Mobutu was deposed, with Kabila fighting a second war in 1998 before dying under mysterious circumstances.

Yet there is no evidence that the United States set out to sow disarray or conflict in the Congo. Neither Eisenhower nor Kennedy had anything to gain through the chaos and brutality that characterized the Congo for much of 1960 and 1961. Indeed, the goal of both Administrations was quite the opposite, to establish a stable and peaceful state in the Congo, both for access to the country's mineral resources and also to deny the spread of communism into central Africa. The United States realized that in the Congo, as in much of the Third World, it could pursue its interests strongly without enduring much scrutiny from the international community. Worldwide attention was rarely focused on the Congo, certainly less than it might have been given the years of violence and political turmoil. Indeed, G. Mennen Williams found that the U.S. standing in Africa was improved by its handling of the Congo Crisis, itself a stark commentary on the neglect of the Eisenhower Administration.

In the end, the policies of Eisenhower and Kennedy were substantially similar because their points of view on Africa turned out to be more similar than either might have anticipated. Kennedy considered the question more carefully than Eisenhower, but he ultimately joined his predecessor in the belief that meaningful cooperation with the countries of Africa was not worth its costs, if it led to tensions with America's European allies or the possibility of a communist victory on the continent. For all the effort expended by the U.S. to deal with the Congo Crisis, genuine American interests in the country were fairly weak, something that Kennedy came to realize. This meant that for

(at least) two successive presidential administrations, it made sense to try to exert influence in order to arrive at a favorable resolution in the Congo, but that it was not worthwhile to fundamentally shift course. It was an excellent campaign strategy for Kennedy to present himself at the forefront of this emerging issue in world affairs, and it was a successful one. Kennedy may have been willing to adopt a more supportive stance in the best of circumstances, but that scenario did not come to pass. Kennedy and his Administration treated the Congo almost the same as Eisenhower and his Administration had.

In their stances on Lumumba, in their efforts to replace him and in their responses to the Katanga secession, Eisenhower and Kennedy acted like world leaders and looked out primarily for their own national interests. Unfortunately, their national interests seldom lined up with the national interests of the Congo, especially when the country was ruled by Patrice Lumumba. The great triumph of Kennedy's personal charisma is that he was able to convince so many skeptical people, in media, in the international arena or in the historical profession, that he was doing something else.

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